

# BANDWAGON

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

September-October 1998

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# BANDWAGON

## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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**FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER**

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### THE FRONT COVER

The Greatest Show on Earth opened its five year tour of Europe on December 27, 1897 in London, England. The summer seasons of 1898 and 1899 were spent in Great Britain.

New tents arrived from the United States in January 1900 and were fireproofed to meet German codes. Two boat loads took the show to Hamburg, Germany. The rail cars were unloaded in Hamburg and placed on tracks.

The Barnum & Bailey Circus opened in Hamburg on April 15 and remained there until May 15. A parade was given on April 14. The 1900 German season closed in Passau on November 9. The show opened in Vienna on November 25, 1900 and remained there until February 24, 1901.

The cover of the program for the German tour is on the cover. It is from the Pfening Archives.

### THE BACK COVER

The front of the Honest Bill Shows 1927 courier is on the back cover. Honest Bill Newton, the owner of the truck circus, was featured. It is from the Pfening Archives.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete.(signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr, publisher. (8-27-98)

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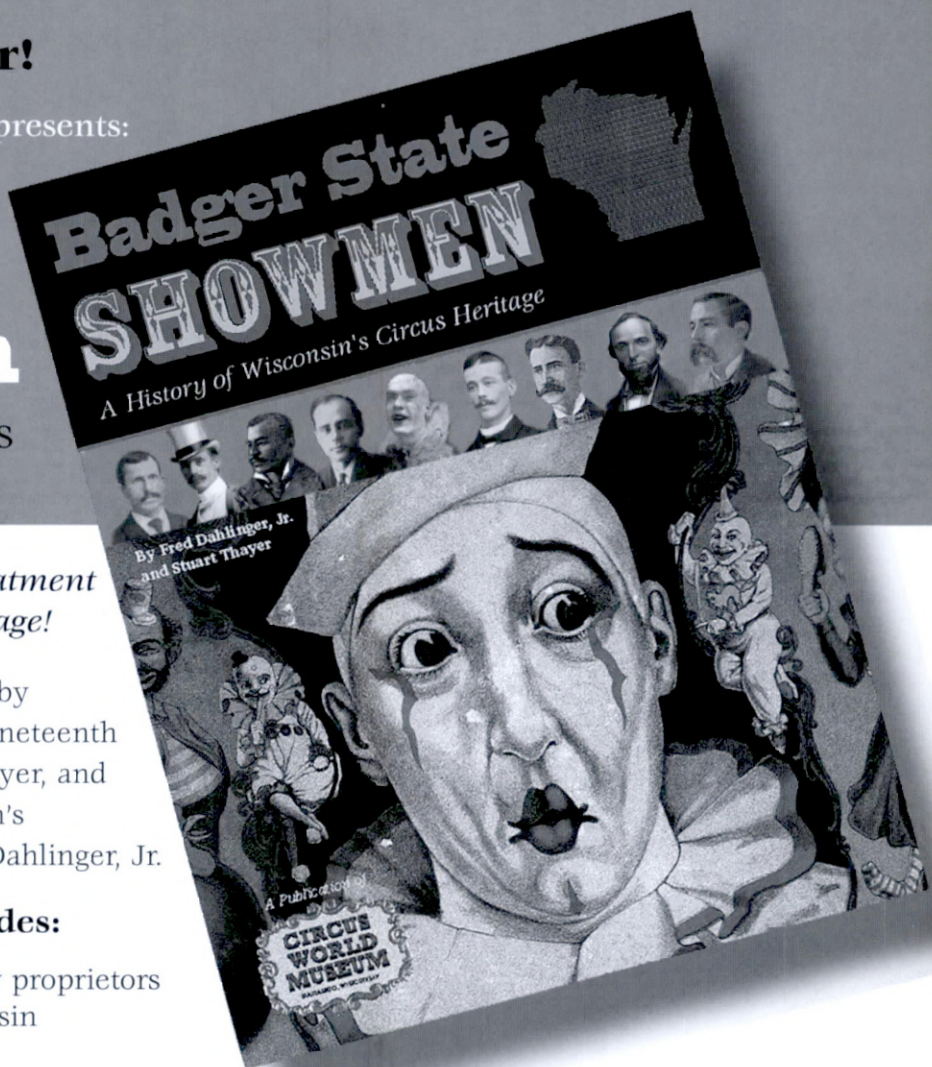
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# MUGIVAN AND BOWERS

## FIRST BIG BANDWAGON

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

In 1904, Jeremiah Joseph "Jerry" Mugivan (1873-1930) and Albert C. "Bert" Bowers (1874-1936), two experienced circus staffers, pooled their resources and launched their first circus, the Great Van Amburg Shows. Over the ensuing seventeen years they operated from one to four circuses. Between 1921 and 1929 their American Circus Corporation, an empire that grew to encompass five large railroad circuses, presented the most serious competition to industry leader Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The bandwagon covered in this monograph is significant for it is the earliest extant vehicle from the many successful Mugivan and Bowers circus ventures. It served as the lead bandwagon of one of their circuses continuously from circa 1911 through 1925, with the possible exception of one year. It is also one of the few existing lead bandwagons used by a smaller railroad circus that later served on a major show in the same capacity. Finally, it may be the ultimate product of a small town wagon shop, which is best remembered for its more diminutive dog and pony show wagons.

It had been circus practice as early as 1847, when carved bandwagons were introduced to circus parades, to place the featured vehicle in the lead or first position. It was ahead of everything in the street demonstration except perhaps the owner, on horseback or in a carriage, or a mounted trumpeter who may have blown a fanfare before the parade arrived in town. The first bandwagon was the finest of the show's decorated wagons, fitted with the most elaborate carvings. It carried a big band of musicians dressed in special uniforms and was drawn by the show's best long team of horses, often decorated with special trappings, plumes

and hame covers. With all of the finest elements put together in one ensemble, the lead bandwagon was the show's way of putting its best foot forward at the head of the procession. By itself, it became a hallmark of quality of the entire circus.

The subject vehicle is believed to have been the first major bandwagon with significant wood carved ornamentation commissioned and owned by Mugivan and Bowers. Some have suggested that it was one of three tableaus they purchased over the winter of 1910-1911. In a March 19, 1921 *Billboard* interview, Mugivan himself recalled the date and the acquisition. It has been speculated that Sullivan & Eagle of Peru, Indiana fabricated the wagon. This firm manufactured circus wagons for hometown showman Ben E. Wallace (1848-1921), although it is best known for its Gentry Bros. dog

The 1912 Howe's Great London band in front of the Lion & Gladiator. Two future bandleaders, Henry Kyes and Carl Robinson, were members of the band. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

and pony show vehicles and several interesting steam calliopes. There is little in the overall design of the wagon to suggest a Peru heritage other than the corner scrollwork. Similar pieces were placed on calliopes wagons that Sullivan & Eagle fabricated between 1902 and 1910. Without doubt it was the finest and perhaps largest bandwagon to roll out of the Sullivan & Eagle shop, if indeed it came from their Peru operation.

At this removed date it is difficult to determine the exact theme the carvers were trying to convey in their work. As is the case with so many other wagon names given by circus fans, the "lion and gladiator" moniker may be a misnomer. The central figure, a man in combat with a gendered male lion, is not clothed as a gladiator, as in the sense of a military figure with armaments. Wearing only a cloth wrapped around his torso, he may be a gladiator in the sense of being a paid combatant, slave or captive who is hand-fighting an animal for the entertainment of others. Instead of labeling him as a nondescript gladiator, he may actually represent Samson, the Biblical figure of leg-





endary strength; or David, the shepherd-king, another Biblical figure; or the mythological Hercules, another strongman who strangled the fearsome Nemean lion in his bare hands. This battle was the first of the "Twelve Labors of Hercules" to which he was subjected by



Eurystheus. All three have been symbolized wrestling with a lion in art. The bounding lionesses, trumpeting putti (winged angels) and dinosaurian-like figure on the skyboard do little to expand understanding of the central figure representation.

The wagon resembles a tableau built for the 1910 Norris & Rowe Shows by the Leonhardt Wagon Manufacturing Company of Baltimore. Similarities include the central arch with a figure below it and the leaping lionesses on either side. It is possible that this wagon served as the inspiration for Sullivan & Eagle, or maybe the original concept came from a design book on furniture or architecture that both builders saw independently.

The Great Van Amburg Shows was retitled Howe's Great London Circus during the middle of the 1908 tour. It retained that identity for the next eight seasons. The earliest specific documentation of the bandwagon is a photograph labeled Howes, 1912, showing the band, led by Charles H. Tinney (?—1917), standing in front of the wagon. The protruding caulk between the side planking suggests some use by the date of the photograph. At this time, the wagon was painted a dark color, with two small, irregular-shaped mirrors on each side. The carvings were probably covered entirely in gold leaf.

Mugivan and Bowers bought the Dode Fisk Circus and in 1911 placed two troupes on tour, their Howe's outfit and the former Fisk show, which they named Sanger's Greater European Shows. The two showmen never used their own names on any circus they owned. To avoid paying royalties, they altered famous circus names of the past for their own use.

The Robinson Famous Shows parade in Wilmington, Ohio on May 5, 1915. Marion Organ photo.

Sanger, a well known English circus name, was changed by the addition of adjectives. Van Amburgh (originally with an "h") and Howes (no apostrophe) became Van Amburg (without an "h") and Howe's (with an apostrophe). A similar technique was employed in 1913 when they renamed the Sanger show as Robinson's Famous Shows. They planned to trade on the market presence of the famous John Robinson Circus, which they did not own. In response, the owners of the real John Robinson title placed notices in the *Billboard* to dissociate themselves from the Mugivan and Bowers operation.

Both Mugivan and Bowers troupes wintered in Montgomery, Alabama during the winter of 1913-1914, at which time the subject bandwagon was transferred from Howe's to Robinson's Famous. It served as the lead bandwagon on the Robinson's outfit through 1916. In 1914, the bandwagon was pulled by eight white Percherons fitted with head plumes and large hame covers with lettering reading "Robinson's Famous Shows." The number "30" was on the front of the wagon and the drivers wore pith helmets. A 1915 Marion Organ photograph shows the wagon in parade without a number and with small footrests to ascend the front of the wagon. It retained its dark body color and side mirrors. The front and back of the wagon were both decorated with a simple painted rectangle of a light color, possibly the same gold that was applied to the carvings. Dapple

Percherons, decorated with dark plumes on the bridles and hame covers bearing the show title, pulled the wagon in parade.

Mugivan and Bowers bought the bonafide John Robinson Circus on March 6, 1916, sold off the equipment and placed the title on what had

been their Robinson's Famous Shows. For reasons unclear, the two Mugivan and Bowers troupes were combined for 1917 into one large 45-car show, the largest they would ever operate. It carried the John Robinson title. Perhaps they had intentions of going to the top with their big circus and famous title. Possibly their egos caused them to make an attempt at the big time, their appetite whetted during their short involvement as partners in the huge Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus of 1907. The wagon's appearance remained basically the same except that in 1917 a light colored digit "1" was applied to the front with dark drop shading to the bottom left. At least six dapple Percherons with hame covers bearing the new show name pulled the wagon in parade.

The big John Robinson circus operation lasted only one year. American involvement in World War I and the influence the United States Railroad Administration (USRA), a temporary federal agency, had over show movements could have caused the duo to rethink their plans. As the war went on, all enterprises had to cope with a shortage of manpower and a deadly influenza epidemic. For 1918 and 1919, Mugivan and Bowers cut the show to 30 cars and it remained their single operation. The duo then bought the 30-car Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus at a receiver's sale in 1919 and brought an investor, C. Edward Ballard (1874-1936) into their partnership. In 1920 they put out both 30-car troupes and added a 15-car outfit, reactivating the Howe's title. They purchased the 30-car Sells-Floto Circus in 1921 and expanded Howe's to 25 cars, raising their combined operations to 115 cars. The second act of 1921 was to



form the American Circus Corporation as the parent company for all of their holdings. Another high point was reached the following year when Sells-Floto went to 40 cars and Howe's, renamed Gollmar Bros., went out on 31 cars, raising their four circus fleet to 131 cars. Industry leader Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey operated a single circus on 100 cars.

The vehicle continued to serve as the lead bandwagon on John Robinson but was assigned the number "30" during the years 1920 to 1922. A real life color African savannah scene, featuring a male lion and palm tree, completely covered the two rear doors. The small footrests of 1915 were replaced by two sets of grab irons, one on either side of the driver's footrest. In 1921, a team of eight gray Percherons was assigned to the wagon, each bearing a dark bridle plume and large hame cover. The side mirrors were still intact in 1922.

The status of the wagon in 1923 is uncertain. It is thought to have remained in Peru winter quarters, but might have been part of the Corporation's Sells-Floto Circus, where it served as the first bandwagon in 1924 and 1925. The John Robinson paint scheme, including the side mirrors, remained intact in 1924 when the drivers wore pith helmets in parade. Radical changes were made for 1925, including the application of a polychromatic paint scheme. It was the most drastic departure from the usual monochromatic, classic revival style painting in the entire existence of the wagon, but it reflected contemporary American show decorative techniques. The male combatant, the three lions and the putti were all painted in flesh or lifelike colors. Blue sky and green grass were painted in under the central arch on the side. The wagon was assigned the number "85," which was applied in a three-color arrangement below the footboard. The mirrors were painted over and a shaded "S"



John Robinson Circus parade in 1921.

and "I" applied to them. Scrollwork and corner carvings retained their previous gold color. In contrast to the multicolor wagon, the bandsmen who rode it in 1925 wore white uniforms, dark trousers and military style hats.

Mugivan and Bowers dispensed with street parades after the 1925 season, the daily march no longer being practical in the changed culture of America's larger cities. The wagon remained in the Corporation winter quarters at Peru, Indiana for the next nine years. Mugivan and Bowers had operated three 30-car troupes throughout most of the 1920s, using the John Robinson, Hagenbeck-Wallace and Sells-Floto titles. Following several years of trying, in late 1928 the Corporation again expanded its holdings with the

purchase of the 10-car Sparks Circus, followed in early 1929 by the purchase of the Al G. Barnes Circus, a 30-car outfit. Simultaneous with these actions, the Corporation was preparing the necessary paperwork to take itself public, no doubt to relieve the principal owners of their investment at great profit. All of the machinations came to naught, for the entire operation, in-

cluding five operating circuses, 145 cars of equipment, the winter quarters property, and several defunct circus titles were sold to John Ringling on September 6, 1929. Forced to either buy the Corporation or sell his flagship circus, Ringling's timing couldn't have been worse. Black Friday was just a few weeks away.

The effects of the Depression forced the closure of John Robinson after 1930, Sparks after 1931 and Sells-Floto following 1932. Hagenbeck-Wallace continued on tour through 1938, as did the Barnes Circus. Ringling lost control of all of his circuses in 1932, his bankers bringing in Samuel W. Gumpertz (1870-1952), a Coney Island showman, to manage the affairs of the three RBBB-owned circuses over the next five years.

Jess Adkins (1886-1940) is remem-

The Sells-Floto Circus band in 1925. Circus World Museum collection.







bered with great fondness for his embracement of circus traditions at a time when they were abandoned by other showmen. As manager of the Ringling-owned Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, Adkins took control of the 31-car show of 1931 and expanded it to 37 cars by 1933. He added a steam calliope for lot concerts in 1932 and the following year began to stage street parades in select locations to build an audience. He even reactivated the idea of torchlight night parades and staged them in Chicago, something that had reportedly not been done since 1899. For 1934, he received permission to expand the show to 49 cars and staged a mammoth parade each and every day. Adkins not only selected notable parade wagons from the vast holdings at Peru, he had the Ringling bell wagon shipped down from Baraboo, Wisconsin and the so-called Five Graces bandwagon brought in from Sarasota, Florida to augment the procession. The resulting street parade of forty-three units included the lead bandwagon, an air calliope, an unafon, the bell wagon, eight tableaus carrying bands or riders, sixteen Corporation and Wallace cage wagons and a steam calliope, in addition to mounted riders and other parade elements. It was the finest street demonstration by any circus since Ringling-Barnum abandoned the march after 1920.

For identification purposes, the wagon was given the number "102" in 1934. The body returned to a solid dark color with gold carvings. The mirrors that had once graced the sides were either removed or painted over. Real life scenery, predominantly in green and blue, was painted in the area around the central figures. And

The Lion & Gladiator wagon newly painted in the Peru winterquarters in the spring of 1934.

encircled white-face clown bust was painted on the front of the wagon. The number "102" was painted on the front and back, with the back also receiving a painted rectangle and other minor decoration. By this time the carved panel below the rear doors had been deleted. In parade the wagon was drawn by six dapple Percherons with head plumes and hame covers. Tricolor banners were placed at the four corners of the roof. The clown band rode the wagon, marking the first time it had not served as a lead bandwagon.

Following the great success of the 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace tour, Adkins left the show to launch the Cole Bros. Circus with Zack Terrell. Though it reportedly grossed more than RBBB in 1934, management cut the Hagenbeck-Wallace show to 35 cars for 1935. That year, the parade was dropped as a standard offering, and the subject bandwagon again relegated to Peru storage. This wagon, along with several others, was selected for possible further use and escaped the massive destruction of wagons that took place in Peru in the fall of 1941. On April 9, 1944, it was loaded onto a railroad flat car with the other selected vehicles and sent to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's Sarasota, Florida winter quarters to await further disposition.

World War II caused a resurgence in traditional American values. Following the disastrous Hartford fire in 1944, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus decided to regain some lost confidence and pop-

ularity by undertaking an activity that harkened back to happier times. They staged an "old time" circus street parade in New York City on April 9, 1945 in support of bond sales for the Seventh War Loan. The last RBBB parade, staged on April 21, 1923 in New York City, had been a special public benefit to support the Milk Fund. To execute the 1945 procession, the subject wagon, along with the Five Graces bandwagon, an original Carl Hagenbeck tableau and a Hagenbeck-Wallace air calliope, were refurbished and placed on pneumatic tires. The vehicles toured throughout 1945 with RBBB, being used in the season's spectacle "Alice in Circus Wonderland." It was pulled by a team of four dapple Percherons and carried a bevy of ballet girls in fancy wardrobe and hats. The wagon body was painted white with gold carvings. The number "69" and some scrollwork were painted on the front. The brake wheel and shaft were removed and a foot brake installed on the opposite side of the footboard. The rear wheel brake beam was also removed.

The parade wagon was returned to winter quarters at the end of the tour. About 1948, RBBB placed the wagon at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota. The pneumatic wheels and associated undergear were replaced in 1958 with conventional sunburst wagon wheels. The rear wheel diameters were smaller than those originally on the wagon, imparting it with an untypical rake toward the rear. A brake wheel and shaft were reinstalled in the same offhand location as the 1945 applied foot brake. A replacement brake beam was



installed, but instead of being made of wood it was fabricated from a steel beam. Following construction of the Ringling Museum's Circus Galleries, the wagon was relocated indoors and remained on exhibit there until September 1979.

When John Ringling North and others decided to sell Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus to Irvin and Israel Feld and Judge Roy Hofheinz in 1967, certain parties advised them to specifically include the RBBB wagons at the Florida museum in the transaction inventory. In the late 1970s, the Felds planned to utilize the wagons in street parades at the RBBB-owned Circus World theme park near Haines City, Florida. Faced with the Ringling Circus' demand for the return of the loaned wagons, Ringling Museum officials claimed ownership on the basis of abandonment. To avoid a protracted legal battle over ownership, representatives of the Ringling Museum and RBBB eventually determined which wagons would be retained by the museum and which would return to the circus. By that route the subject wagon and others were returned to the physical possession of RBBB in September 1979. The wagons were moved to an abandoned Ford automobile dealership in Bradenton, just off of Cortez Road, for storage. On March 17, 1982, Irvin Feld exchanged his stock in Circus World theme park for Mattel's stock in the RBBB Circus, thereby ending Feld's interest in parading the wagons at Circus World.

The wagons were subsequently relocated to a warehouse on the far east side of Bradenton, near the airport, on property leased by RBBB. In November 1984, the wagons—four parade wagons, two Al G. Barnes baggage wagons and two RBBB clown fire trucks—were placed on loan to Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The wagon was recently restored to its 1917 John Robinson Circus appearance by the Museum's skilled craftsmen.

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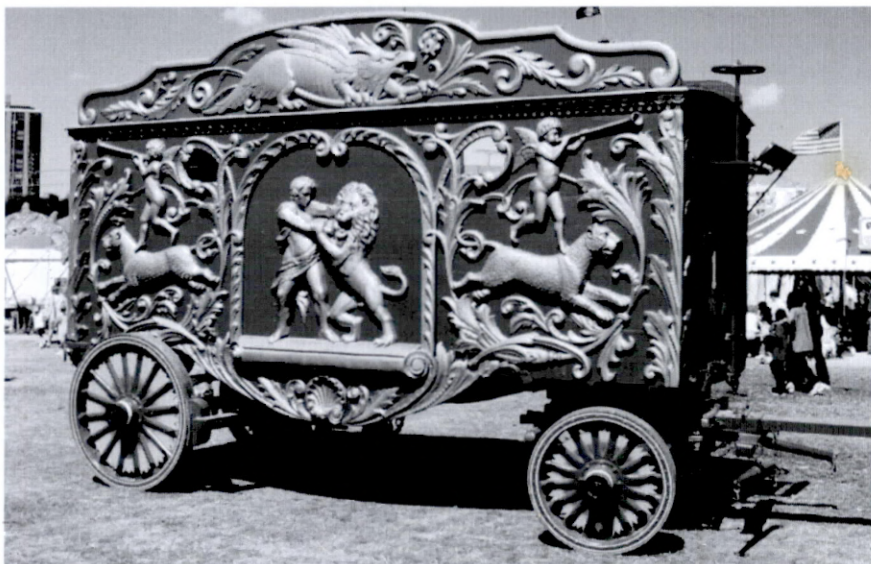
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The newly painted wagon in Milwaukee for the 1998 Great Circus Parade.





# GRIFTERS, TRAILERS, BUTCHERS AND PEELERS; SHOWFOLKS THE FANS DIDN'T PHOTOGRAPH

By Al Stencell

*This paper was presented at the 1998 Circus Historical Society Convention in Atlanta, Georgia.*

Grifters, trailers, butchers, and peelers. These are the show folks the fans didn't photograph. This talk was prompted by my search for photos of such characters around shows and my disappointment in the lack of such photos in circus fan collections in archival institutions. Oh yes, there are thousands of photos of clowns and maybe twenty times that of ballet girls, and most of those aren't even posed in front of a wagon or other useful show gear that would help identify the show. Then, there are the numerous animal photos. I especially like the elephants shots taken from behind. Maybe the late Bill Woodcock, Sr. could tell if it was Queenie or Cross County Babe from that kink in the tail or extra roll of flesh behind the knee, but not me.

A few years ago I was heading somewhere in my zig-zag fashion when I came across a fair in Indiana and stopped to see what was there. It was a rainy night with little activity on the lot. I came across Paul Miller who was one of the first carnies to put out a shopping center unit featuring a circus to draw the locals out so the rides and more importantly, the joints, could get a shot at them. This was the last place Terrell Jacobs worked his animal acts. When I saw Paul he was leaning up against a relic. Inside the center joint was an old fashioned Oscar the Mouse Game and a few people were betting money on which hole Oscar would appear each time their money was laid down and the big oval disc was spun around. Oscar knew which hole. So did Paul Miller's crew, but the marks sure as hell didn't. Across from the mouse game sat Paul's son in a clothes pin store. The chilly night was beginning to heat up.

I was very surprised to see these



Al Stencell, circus owner, author and after dinner speaker. Fred Pfening, Jr. photo.

joints on today's family fun midway and I started a conversation with Paul about the good old days. Miller summed up our half hour visit by saying: "You know Al, the heart and soul went out of the carney business when the flat stores and cooch shows left the lots for good." I have to agree with him. Gone are the hundreds of characters with colorful nicknames and even more flamboyant reputations. No more Good Kid Louis, Miami Whitey, Frankie the Machine, G-Note Johnny, Silent Sam the Outside Man, and Doc Bloom—the Little Man From Alabam.

It was a hot July day when I sat down in my back yard with One Arm Vince. It was a nice day for him as he didn't have to go in for dialysis and was feeling up to jack potting for a few hours. He regaled me with story after story of the above-named characters, how they earned their monikers, reputations and habits. They may seem like degenerates, but Vince called them "business associates." Our corporate lunch was going swell!

G-Note Johnny got his nickname

as the result of beating a mark for a thousand dollars the first time he worked in a joint. Frankie the Machine was queer for shoes and traveled with no less than fifty pairs in the trunk of his car. Another PC worker, one of the best around on a G-Wheel or Skillo was Soldier Smitty. He was a Limey and always wore a beat up legion beret. When there were no winners on his game, Smitty would say: "That one's for the church." Gone is his constant cry: "This is an old game of Do-Dittle and Duck, the more you put down, the more you pick-up."

A few weeks after Vince's visit, he too, collected his ten points. Jack Robertson, another old carney friend, related this story to me. An agent on a Canadian carnival playing in western Canada was arrested for operating a questionable game and brought before a judge. The judge asked the agent his name and the agent said that on the lot they called him Box-A-Car Tony. The magistrate further asked the obviously Italian gentleman if his game was a game of chance. Tony shot back, "Judge, no one-got-a-no-chance-a-here." The judge leaned toward Tony from his elevated stand and said: "Well Box Car, I'm afraid I'm going to have to put you on a side track for three months."

One fascinating aspect of gaming grift is the various jobs and skills required to run the operation successfully: boosters, sticks, shills, outside men, cleaners, reach-over men, agents, gunners, and on and on. Each game requires a certain number of men, but fortunately only one good player.

A grifter friend in Miami who had worked about every known con game and scam told me the best-gaffed game he liked to work was the Nine Dice Cloth. It was worked on an open table with six to eight sticks, two outside men, one reach-over man, a



cleaner, and an inside man, plus the mark, all around a small table. He was ninety years old and he said with much enthusiasm, "That's the game I broke in on at Douglas, Arizona in 1916. I'd been hoboing it for two years and I came across this mob running this game and they needed another stick. I asked the guy running the game: 'What do I do,' and the inside man replied: 'Stand up straight like a telegraph pole; keep your mouth shut and play when told to do so.' The best part for me was just standing there doing nothing, keeping my mouth shut and at the end of the evening being given five silver dollars. That's what changed my life, made a grifter out of me."

"The biggest score I ever got was with the Nine Dice Cloth working outside the men's washroom at the race track at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island fair where I beat a mark for \$1800 dollars." The Jersey Kid lived well into his nineties in a luxury condo near Miami Beach. He was one of the very few grifters who managed to hang onto his bankroll.

Yes, the good old days. They are certainly gone. Walk on any carnival lot today and they all look the same, the same rides with the same themned manufacturers' paint job, the same electronic or ball toss games, and no back ends. Go to what few tent circuses are left and you find no side shows on their midways and butchers being paid a flat salary rather than a percentage. Nobody is on the midway selling concert tickets half way through the big show. Even the lots seem to lack that old time smell of trampled grass, diesel fumes, and animal manure.

You don't feel that edge of unexpected thrills, sights, or danger. No lurid promises of voyeuristic sex for fifty cents. No Shebas on Trampled Grass. The strippers and peelers have left the lot, too. Today, for the price of a draft beer, these nude girls are routine lunch fare at corner bars. Female patrons walking on the lot expose more flesh in their everyday street attire any than showmen could promise behind a canvas wall.

Sex and grift have been

associates on fairgrounds from the earliest show days. Ask any old-time back end showman what is the strongest seller on any midway and he will say SEX: girl shows, unborn shows, and side shows featuring half and halves. Side show blow-off operators were able to get their laundry out with the Man With Two Faces, but they really banked money with Albert-Alberta.

In America, organized touring carnival companies started after the success of the Midway Pleasance area at the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893. The hootchie-coochie dance was given birth there. Little Egypt, or as we now learn from Donna Carlton's book *Looking For Little Egypt*, was just a good publicity scheme that saw the fair awash with many Little Egypts, Fatimas, and assorted Oriental dancers. The dance du vent, oriental dancing, or hootchie-coochie, whatever you want to call it, became a light beacon attracting male patrons to the show lots. The dance became part of many carnival shows, circus side shows, and even refined vaudeville. By the early 1900's American theater showmen were presenting a new flesh product called Burlesque. Carnivals and circuses took their queues from big city night life. Hot burlesque shows were aped on carnival lots. Red, Hot, and Blue! Nudity on the fairground lots got so bad in the early 1900's that carnival owners got together to try to curtail it to protect losing big city still dates and the lucrative fall route of fairs. Elks

An early girl show on the Lachman-Loos carnival in 1907. Pfening Archives.



Clubs, which were instrumental in the start and success of the street fair business, forbade their clubs to sponsor further midway shows. The *Billboard* carried a "Rat Page" where show folks wrote in to expose nudity or grift. Patrons, city officials and fair board managers wrote in as well. One midway patron wrote that even when she took her small children to see the wild animal show they were exposed to a near-naked female form. Down in the Well Shows and '49 Camp Shows quickly blackened the carnival's reputation. The '49 Camps presented a chance for male patrons to dance with the dance hall girls for ten cents a dance, the start of the Taxi Dance Hall Business, and present today in B-girl operations in various adult entertainment bars. Booze was also served to patrons of the '49 Camps on midways and the eventual troubles that pursued brought so much heat that the '49 Camp craze was short lived.

When nudity on shows was closed down in one area or on a particular show, it was retooled or refashioned in another way. When the heat was on girl shows, the carnies presented Water Shows that featured water ballets, comic swimmers, trick and high diving, and best of all, skimpy costumes on the girls.

Grift on shows came in many forms and in many places. On carnivals it was usually associated with the front end where the games were laid out. Many shows had the games in rows and sometimes their awnings would touch one another so the patrons, on entering the front gate, were funneled through this area with agents reaching out for their money; "Hey buddy, try this, win a big doll

for the little lady, lookee here, here's a little card for a free game," and so it went until the mark reached daylight by the merry-go-round where the rides started down the center, flanked by the various shows. Surviving a walk past all the concessions didn't always guarantee a healthy pocket book. One friend who operated a War Show had Soldier Smitty in there in the back by the display of guns with a Skillo.



Smitty's aim on your pocketbook was truer than any German sniper.

Patty Conklin, probably North America's greatest midway operator, made no bones in telling people how he made his fortune: Controlled games. Patty came out of Brooklyn New York and after his adoptive father, a grifter, legal adjuster, game owner, and partner in several carnival operations, died he came to western Canada in the early twenties with a rented box car full of games and stock. Before he and Speed Garrett formed a partnership to start their famous Conklin and Garrett All Canadian Shows, Patty had most of the games on a small truck moving on one or two baggage cars and playing one, two, and three days fairs and sports days celebrations out west. From day one the Conklin Concession Company kept a set of books recording the incomes, loses, and expenses associated with operating a dozen or more controlled and percentage games. One of Patty's big winners was the PopEm In Bucket which he claimed to have invented and was supplying the carnival world with from a company in Brooklyn he had set up in 1920. His 1922 books revealed games called the Big Swinger, Blanket Wheel, Buckets, Candy Race Track, Doll Wheel #1 and #2, Housie Housie, Huckley Buck, Jingle Board, and Tom Cat. That year the Big Swinger was the big money winner, grossing \$4130.95 with expenses to operate it costing \$2564.25 leaving a net profit \$1566.70. All together a total of seventeen agents were employed, including his adopted brother Frank his adoptive mother, and the young Theo Forestall, who was later around the offices of most major circuses. The expense ledger, still in existence, showed the most money spent, after stock, custom duties, and percentage paid to the show owner, was for legal expenses. Patty had to do his own patching. His final income statement showed he was a true corporate businessman as he wrote off \$500.00 for depreciation on the equipment. He believed his business was as legitimate as any other, or at least the books would be.

Besides business records, journals of the day to day operation of the

show were kept. The three day fair in Carman, Manitoba was noted as "Would have been a good spot if the police hadn't made it rough." June 20-29 in Winnipeg, the police closed the PC wheels. In Vegreville, Alberta, the wet, skin-hugging weather was fine, but the business not so good. A fight started in the arcade and a man was hit on top of the head, causing a lot of heat. The mayor and local councilmen caused a lot of agitation. A man snatched a pot from Rip Winkler and it looked bad on the midway. All joints were closed and all men were sent to the cars. August 11 to 13 at North Battleford, Saskatchewan saw the show have its biggest day with a notation that the joints worked all day. September 3-7 at Lethbridge, Alberta they had a lot of trouble with the joints. "Inspector Brown wouldn't stand for anything. Chief of Police Harris was O.K. but not very smart." No doubt the fix didn't stick.

On their first fair of the B-Circuit it was noted "the trouble we anticipated with the weird inspector proved up and we closed the line-up stores at 7 P.M. and wired Huxley saying we could not play any more B-Circuit fairs in Saskatchewan if their rigid regulations were enforced." At Yorkton, Saskatchewan things got back to normal. "Chief of Police Heddon was in charge with Corporal Killfree of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Both O. K. Fifty and one hundred dollars." And at Red Deer one sees the value of keeping a show journal: "Jack Holmes was here and the same as ever, one hundred and fifty dollars." The fix could add up, too. In North Battleford it looked like a police convention. "Ten special police but they didn't amount to anything. Also, Sergeant Aitkins of Regina, Constable Kingston of Cut Knife, and Corporal Fieldhouse all assisted Chief Felker; fifty, fifty, seventy-five and one hundred and fifty."

One way of cooling off the mark,

especially if he had lost a lot of money, was to lug him off the lot and take him to a bar, get him drunk and leave him there. If his loses were small, they might just take him over to the girl show and let him in free. This move could also put the mark back into the clutches of another mob.

James Wesley "Patty" Conklin in 1928. Conklin Archives.



In the early 1950's on Johnny Denton's Gold Metal Shows, Bill English operated one of the girl shows and the office sent down a broad mob which worked in all three girl shows on the lot, going from one to the other

with a tripod and a gas lantern. The mob was run by Hobe Cole. They worked with a minimum of three men. They needed a booster handler who generally lined up a couple of local guys as sticks to handle the play. One became a shade whose job it was to simply lean this way and that way to cover the play from anyone not directly involved in the game, and the other was an outside man who was suppose to egg on the mark and sometimes even to be up town during the day to line up some likely marks for the joint.

The booster handler handled the money and nudged the two sticks when it was their turn to bet and when they were going to win he passed them the money. They played and collected their winnings and then passed the money back to him. The sticks were not allowed to ever hold onto the money. They would be paid a few bucks each and got to see the girl show free. The mob could work without the sticks if they didn't need a line of players who looked ready to enter the game. They had three grifters there and the only person up against the joint at one time was the mark. Everybody else was closed in.

The nut mob worked the same way. When men came in the girl show top it was very dark and the grifter working the game would call them



over: "Hey guys while your waiting for the girls to start, let me show you a little lady I know you're going to like." She was the Queen in the suite of cards. The broad mob used three of the four queens in the deck. Of course this immediately got the marks attention as they thought they were going to see a nude photograph. The game started from there and it was worked very smoothly. English said he had seen guys beaten by Hobe Cole come out of the top after the show and in an half hour or so be back with a friend to buy tickets again, but this time the mark had a bet with his friend that he couldn't beat the girl show grifter. The other guy went up against the joint and they both come out shaking their heads!

The broad mob worked with what money the mark had on him. On the joints on the front end if the grift latched onto a good mark and when the mark was tapped out they would put him "on the send" for more money and keep his points open for him. They would tell the mark, "You only need a quarter point to win. I'll hold it for you while you go home and get more scratch."

English went on to say that there was always a big difference between the broad mob guys and the regular flatties in dress, habits, and attitudes. The flatties dressed very well and drove expensive cars. The broad mobbers were usually from New York City, New Jersey, or Miami, more city slickers. The flatties didn't chew tobacco, but the broad mob guys might. The circus grift looked more like the towners, blended in with them. Buck Weaver, the outside man on Cole's mob, always wore, especially in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, railroaders' coveralls, a railroader's cap and had a big watch with a cover on it which he took out from time to time to check the time. Very convincing. English couldn't remember if Cole worked this, but in other broad mobs it was the outside man's job to also put the crimp or bend in the card and get the mark to put more money on a sure bet and of course the dealer would straighten out the crimp in the first pass.



Gypsy Rose Lee on the Royal American Shows. Pfening Archives.

The fixer was suppose to get ten percent, the girl show operator ten percent and the balance was cut up by the mob and the office. English said he got from \$10 to \$20 dollars a night—even if the mob scored a thousand dollars!

In another attempt to appease local laws Posing Shows became popular on carnivals. Some places allowed almost total nudity as long as the subjects were not moving or dancing. Showmen then placed the nude girls on the stage in various artistic and historical poses while a

The Royal Crown Shows girl show in 1950. Author's collection.



story line was read. In the 1940's many of the big rail shows featured girl shows which were merely musical and variety revues with a chorus line. Youngblooded males, coming home from war, wanted more. The more risqué men-only magazine industry swung into gear, and burlesque houses saw renewed business.

Carnivals had to compete and they did. Show owners lured burlesque stars onto their lots and to headline their shows with big-money contracts. Gypsy Rose Lee, Sally Rand, Faith Bacon, and Georgia Southern, all top draws on the burly circuit, drew big crowds to the carnival lots and girl show records were broken at every fair. The late 1940's and early 1950's saw the hey day of the big carnival girl shows and by the mid 1970's their lowly sister, the cooch show, had left the lots for good.

Female nudity on circuses and carnivals was not only an attraction by itself, but also to draw male patrons to the lots where the grift could get at them. The operation of both sex and grift on shows was a hit and miss proposition. Shows moving fast with only one or two dates in a county or state could get by very nicely. They were long gone before orders could be secured to stop them or before garnering bad press, so the local law had to curtail their activities. Out and out grift shows knew their territory and the various towns such as the old standbys of East St. Louis, Illinois; Steubenville, Ohio; and Gary, Indiana.

Bill English said that when he first joined Eddie Young's Royal Crown Shows it played four towns in four different states the first four weeks: Erie, Pennsylvania; Springfield, Ohio; Terre Haute, Indiana; and Salem, Illinois. The show was first class in every way in order to draw people out for the grift. Dave Fineman, the first-class fixer on Johnny Denton's Gold Medal Shows, told English that he liked carnival fixing as it was easier than circuses. On circuses he had to fix a town each day whereas on a carnival he had just one town a week to look after. Dolly Young, who owned Royal Crown Shows along with her husband Eddie, was the



fixer and one of the best of that era.

Shows that didn't have grift, particularly circuses, were not welcome in some towns by the local officials who preferred a grift show with its payoffs and courtesies to a visit by a so-called Sunday School show. Some shows stayed clean, but once they hit the Canadian border they put the grift on. It wasn't always good pickings, however. All shows coming into Canada were required to obtain Travelling Show Licenses in each province and pay a set fee for each town played. For circuses, this fee was based on the number of railroad cars the company traveled on and what paying attractions it had on the lot. The main show and one side show were allowed in the basic fee, but any additional pit shows, concerts, or other charges to the public required higher fees to the government.

The licenses clearly stated no gambling or games of chance. Female dancers in the side show were not prohibited in the license per se, but were dealt with as a morals issue and local police could shut the show down.

On June 8th, 1910 the local police in Niagara Falls, Ontario wrote Joe Rogers, the superintendent of the Ontario Provincial Police, about the side show on the Mighty Haag Circus. The officer wrote that after each side show performance the men were invited to pay ten cents to go behind a curtain where they would be shown something interesting. He continued: "A number of men present and myself were admitted to the apartment where we found a person dressed in female attire on a platform and who put on what is known as the hoochie-coochie performance. The conversation carried on and part of this performance struck me as being out of place. As requested I went to St. Catherines yesterday afternoon where these people were showing and I told Mr. Haag, the manager, to discontinue the hoochie-coochie dance. He agreed to do so."

A few days later Rogers heard from Haag. The letter stated, "the last few days business has been better but



The front of a typical carnival posing show. Pfening Archives.

yesterday at Parry Sound I had my first trouble. I shall explain. The female impersonator that did the dance at Welland hasn't done anything since but sit on his stage with his make-up on, like a woman. As far as I know these people in the side show sell their pictures such as the snake charmer, tattooed lady, and the female impersonator. Now this last one sold some female pictures which were not too nice but still not nude as they had tights on, but around the hips had no trunks but the tights, so on the pictures between the limbs there was a shadow, so one of your men, Mr. Connors, thinking they were nude pictures, arrested the hoochy coochy dancer. Now I'm sorry as I tried hard to cause no trouble, not one dance since the day you said no at Welland, nor did I allow these pictures sold. This was done when I was not looking, still they are not bad, plenty of art pictures hanging around on walls in public places and Art Galleries of women with little over them and so; however, I shall see that no pictures but nice ones shall be handled. I hope you will not be angry with me. Respectfully Earnest Haag."

A few days later Haag wrote again, stating that "so far this week the show hasn't made any money. Yesterday at Glencoe was very light. Please, Mr. Rogers, let me put the dance on with that man, not woman, to help out. To tell the truth, the first thing I know I won't be able to get back to the States unless business gets better."

Haag was not the only show owner to have trouble presenting the hoochie-coochie. James J. Brown, the show detective (read fixer) traveling with Howe's Great London in 1913, wrote Joe Rogers that "business up here is really bad and it keeps the

show busy to get expenses so I am going to ask you a favor. I want you to let us put in our oriental dance through here. If you say you will not bother it I am sure the town officials will let it go as it is to make money with and not so bad. I was told to fit it in the other day but waited until you give me your word."

In 1921 the Floyd King-piloted Sanger show ran into trouble in Woodstock, Ontario where the local constable complained to the OPP about the can-can dance in the side show. The next day at Gait the show received a wire from OPP Inspector Rogers ordering it to stop the dance or the license to show would be canceled. King liked the dance in his side shows and even in the mid 1950's his King Bros. Circus ran ads in the *Billboard* for dancers to work in the side show, plus a flagolet player.

The Ontario law was equally hard on carnivals. J. M. Sheesley wrote from Guelph on September 8, 1920 to Chief Rogers: "Dear Chief: Enclosed you will find some samples of photos that the girl has been selling the past week. I have stopped until I hear from you. I was not aware she was selling them, as she only had them made in Peterboro and they were delivered last week in Belleville. You will notice that they are not nude as reported. She has tights on and her bloomers. Do not misunderstand me, she is not wearing this costume in the show at all." The three enclosed photos are of a oriental type dancer in a very heavily beaded outfit that other than a bare midriff reveals very little flesh although in one pose she is doing the splits.

Cole Bros. Circus through the 1930's and 1940's had a very good cooch operation in its side show. One end of the side show top had a special proscenium hanging in front of the round end center pole and guyed out from the quarter poles to the side poles. The girls stood on high stages behind which were doorways cut in the proscenium. At one end, by the side wall, was a ticket box and a doorway for the men. Once inside, the men were entertained by three female entertainers, two of whom



were female impersonators.

On Dailey Bros., the side show tent was also curtained off at one end. Behind the curtain, the closed in round end was again divided. Men were invited into this area first and it was here that the grift worked three *carte monte* and shell games. The grift used ironing boards for tables and gas lanterns for light. Only after the mob got through with them did the girls take over. Time from when the side show manager made his first opening until the girls danced on the blow off was about forty minutes after the night show ended, according to Ward Hall. By the time the girls hit the small stage the tent was almost down, just the last center pole standing and the last round end canvas piece held up by a couple of side poles and the side show canvas crew. Once the last girl on stage flashed, the lights went out and the crew pulled out the side poles, dropping the canvas onto the heads and backs of the towners. By the time the marks got out from under the canvas the girls and grift were in the gilly station wagon and heading for the train.

The Dailey show saw some pretty good grifters. Gypsy Red recalled Mickey O'Brien who one year operated the "greasy pig" or shell game and one year was the patch. He also remembered Johnny Stephens, Dick Bass, and Joe Baker. Besides the games in the side show, the grift often had a small razzle joint set up at the end of the side show bannerline at the top of the midway. Like the butchers on the show, the grift had Chinese to do. The butchers set the menagerie top up. The big top crew took it down as soon as the night show started. The grift's job was to put up the side show bannerline each morning and Ben Davenport, the show's owner, showed up regularly and if the grifters weren't there to put up the bannerline they didn't work that day.

Some of the best show information and history recorded in the *Billboard* magazine is not in the articles, but in the show want ads. Take, for examples, ads running for Dailey Bros. in 1946. Fred Brad wanted to hear from Fall River Brownie, Rome Shopshire,



Cooch show girls making an opening on the bally platform of Cole Bros. side show in 1935. Pfening Archives.

Deep Sea Red or any other capable man and later wanted two good reliable men to work with Fred Brad. Gypsy Red played trombone in the Dailey side show minstrel band and he said it was the band members' job to keep an eye open for police in the side show. If a policeman came into the tent the band broke into the tune "Deep in the Heart of Texas" and Deep Sea Red and the boys put out their lanterns, let the ironing boards collapse on the ground and joined the crowd in front of whatever side show act was being presented at the time. Once the police left the tent the grift would go back to work. "Gather round gents and I will show you how they raffle off turkeys in China." If the grift was at full strength there would be four men to each mob, two sticks, an outside man and a dealer. When a stick won he would take the money from the dealer and discreetly give it to the outside man, who would count it and then give it back to the stick. The stick would gamble along with the mark, egging on the mark to raise his wager and they would both lose their money.

Another mob on Dailey Bros. was the Ding Mob, usually two people. Pistol Pete worked this for several seasons. He wore a military hat from some overseas conflict and carried a little bag of flag pins. He would come up to people as they walked toward the show in the parking lot or edge of the lot. "Pardon me, sir," he would say as he pinned a flag on them, "would you please make a donation to help the handicapped veterans." If the towners didn't give, Pete took the pin back, sometimes leaving a small hole

in the man's shirt or coat. The dingers gave the show patch a percentage of their gross, traveled on the show train and ate in the show's cookhouse.

An ad in a November 1942 *Billboard* advertised the "PATRIOTIC BOW PIN, American made for PIN ON MEN. \$1.36 a GROSS-SOLD IN 10 GROSS LOTS. Hammer Bros. 114 Park Row, NEW YORK CITY."

Trailers were big around circuses and carnivals. They preferred to not pay the show privilege money and worked on ground just off or beside the show lot. Showing around the big cities such as Boston, Philly, Pittsburgh, and Detroit brought out a swarm of trailers and forty milers. On synopsis sheets for the Ringling show one sees notes from the contracting agent to the twenty-four hour man telling him to make sure he laid the lot out so the side show banner line and the concession line were right up to the side walk on the front of the lot so the trailers had no room to set-up.

Balloon and novelty workers were common trailers, especially Slim Jim workers, men who sold those long skinny balloons. They always had a worker balloon already blown up but the customer didn't get it. They got one that had to be blown up . . . and good luck!

Frequent trailers were sheet writers who sold subscriptions to farm publications or veterans' magazines. Bug men also trailed, selling a lizard as pets. Photographers often trailed shows, some with a small pony to put the kids on to take their photos, some with just a wooden merry-go-round horse on a tripod. Others trucked around small kiddie carnival rides, iron lung shows, and pit shows of every type.

Another trailer favorite was the jam auction. As late as 1969 Oddie Doddie worked a jam auction on the Carson and Barnes front end from the back of his panel truck. By the time the big top was coming down you could hear a shrill whistle coming from the very front of the show grounds. The rear of Oddie Doddie's panel truck was half circled with a dozen or more towners; all holding



paper shopping bags stuffed with worthless pen and pencil sets, knife and cutlery boxes, clock radios, etc. that they had given Oddie Doddie anywhere from twenty to fifty dollars. As his driver started the truck engine, his last move was to tell everyone with the shopping bags he was going to give them one last gift. He handed out whistles and told them to blow as he gestured over their heads toward town. He meant for them to blow, as in take off and get out of here, but they just stood there blowing these whistles as he closed the rear doors and left the marks watching as the panel truck's tail lights faded toward tomorrow's town.

In the twenties and hungry thirties, workers trailed the shows. They would ride the show flats under the wagons. Gypsy Red trailed the John Robinson show seeking work. Each morning the big top crew would line up by the stake and chain wagon and the big top boss would hand out meal tickets for those helping on the top, including the trailers. That was the only way the men could get into the cookhouse. Once they showed up a few times, they were given a meal ticket and allowed to ride the flats. Eventually someone would get hurt or quit and the boss canvasman or his assistant would say put them on the payroll, \$3.50 a week.

I was very lucky to come into the business when the last of the old time butchers, such as Noble Sims, were still working. When I joined Sells and Gray, Sims was in his early sixties but you had to go some to keep up with him. He was great on the Chinese and Sells and Gray had lots of it. The butchers set the marquee, the side show banner line, and the long side reserve seat chair grandstand with its finger-pinching bibles. When that was all done we got to set our own joints and start to make up stock.

Bill English, the manager and part owner of Sells and Gray, had not been happy with the concession grosses. He lured Johnny Walker and his



A group of "Lucky Boys" on the Conklin carnival in the 1920s. Conklin Archives.

crew away from the Beatty show the last year I was on the show. This did not sit well with Frank Orman, the Beatty manager. He warned English that these guys would steal him blind. That year, Sells and Gray had the biggest concession gross in its history, doubling other seasons and as English said later, "they may have grabbed some money, but they doubled the gross and you sure can't complain about that." Peter and Paul Prance had the garbage. Tony Rodriguez and Joe the Banker had the popcorn. Goo Goo Hefflefinger and Never Worry Murray were on the floss. Tommy Matoro and myself had the apples and snow. Red Dutton worked the inside juice, and Mother Bruce had the outside diner. Red drove the Blue Goose, the butchers' sleeper bus, with one hand, keeping the other free to extract palm fulls of bennies from his sweater pocket. Peter Prance stood in the doorway, riding shotgun and every night's jump was a miracle on wheels.

The second day on the show, I watched as Joe the Banker ripped the door off the men's washroom in the park we were showing in to make a crap table. On good days, Goo Goo Hefflefinger floated around the track inside the big top with his pipe jutting from his mouth one way and his floss board resting on his shoulder the other way. He shuffled

around the track and as the rest of us butchers sang out our wares, "Hey Hot Dog, A pound of meat, a loaf of bread, all the mustard you can eat, hey, hot dog," Goo Goo mumbled over and over "mama jabbers, mama jabbers." When the audience exited the top on a really hot day they had the added pleasure of watching Red work the juice joint. He had a Coke dispenser with two

heads. When he got really busy he put a handful of quarters in his mouth, poured and served with both hands and if a customer gave him a dollar for the fifty cent drink he spit back two quarters at him.

Those were the days of showmen and characters, of loyalty to friends, comradeship on the lot, pride in getting it up and down no matter what the weather or where, and faith that tomorrow was going to be the big day, the day you were going to get your winter bank roll.

This paper is being presented largely through the efforts of my wonderful wife Shirley. I owe her big time.

### "ELEPHANTS"

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# THE GIANT RAT SHOWS

By Charles I. Meltzer

*This paper was presented at the 1998 Circus Historical Society convention in Atlanta, Georgia.*

As a pre-teenager in the mid nineteen forties, I was enamored by anything with a link to outdoor show business. After these many years I can't remember all of the details of the rat show I saw that hot summer day in downtown Cedar Rapids, Iowa. However the mental pictures are as vivid today as they were late that summer when I saw the same rat show, or a very similar one at the All Iowa Fair at Hawkeye Downs. (It was later suggested the show I saw was operated by George or Vada Engesser.)

Within a year or two I saw a similar show on the midway of Ben Davenport's Dailey Bros. Circus. It was a perfect attraction for his mid-America high grass operation.

Pit shows, sometimes called "single O's," or walk-throughs, have long been a part of circus midways. They were called pit shows because the attraction was displayed in a pit around which the patrons walked. There were two sets of stairs, one up and the other down at the entrance.

They were cheap to operate, requiring only a ticket seller. Although single midgets or fat ladies were also displayed, the attractions were often freak animals, two headed sheep and the like. In the last fifty years snake shows have been the most popular. In 1949 Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. displayed a giraffe with a fifteen cent admission. It was one of the best money getters on the show. In 1960 that circus had no less than five midway attractions, a gorilla show, a giant python, a giant tortoise, a canyon horse and "Lawrence, the whale." For a number of years Luke

Anderson displayed a hippopotamus on King Bros. and Clyde Beatty midways.

But back to my first acquaintance with this pit show, the trailer mounted "walk-through" was flanked by two of the most enticing pictorials to dazzle my juvenile eyes. They were real shockers to have remained in my memory for over fifty years.

These blood curdling images were most appropriate to the era but would, however, be extraordinarily politically incorrect by today's standards. One panel vividly depicted one of "our boys," a World War II American soldier in the Pacific theater, in the bottom of a pit in a tropical jungle setting. He was being eaten alive by the huge rats, advertised as "alive on the inside." To add further horror to the scene several of the "slant eyed enemies," members of Tojo's forces, were shown gleefully peering down into the "pit of death." The khaki clad blond youth was shown with pained anguish on his rugged all-American face. His eyes validated the fear expected from the horror of the torture. Bleeding gaping holes in his arms and legs were clearly visible through the holes of his sheared uniform. Blood was

The rat show on Dailey Bros. Circus. Author's collection.

pictured dripping from the huge incisors of the immense jungle rats of steaming Asia.

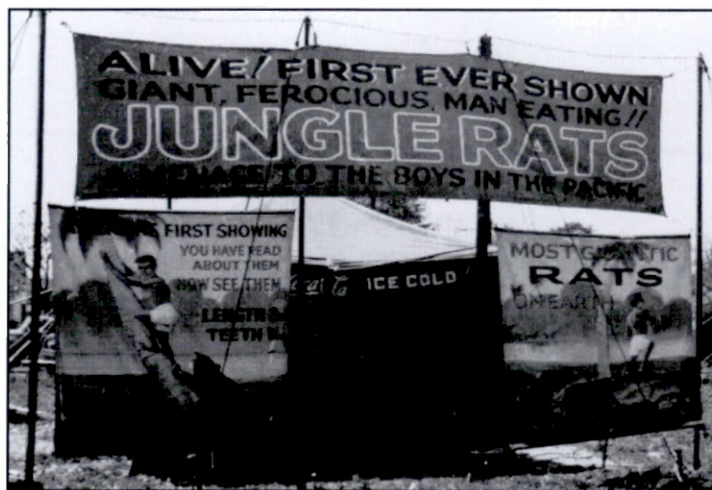
To add further horror to the banner art, these teeth were painted a vivid yellow-orange. The animal's eyes were slanted to correspond with those of the other villains depicted in this classic of banner bombast. The long, nearly hairless rat-like tails added much to the overall revolting image.

The art work on the other side of the steps to the walk-through was equally eye catching. G. I. Joe was again depicted in a tortured mode. This time the captive was in a bamboo cage. Again "the scourge of our boys, fighting for our freedom" were the gigantic rodents attacking helpless soldiers. The human enemy was pictured surly and grimacing gleefully from a safe distance outside the bamboo trap. They were further protected with heavily bayoneted rifles, which they shook at the captives.

The pictures were different, although the plot was the same. From dime novels to melodramas, similar scenarios have been gleefully entertaining the masses for generations. From Tarzan to Indiana Jones, Hollywood has utilized similar themes to thrill the public.

After paying my dime to the talker

I climbed the steps and entered the show and looked down into the metal-lined pit. Half of this cage was a tank of water about a foot deep. The other half was a dry metal shelf. A bowl of alfalfa rabbit pellets and some carrots were being eaten by the two huge rats on display in the cage. The top of the solid sided enclosure was covered by a heavy metal padlocked grid. A "danger





do not touch" sign was prominently displayed. Several large pieces of wood showing the chiseling power of the incisors were also shown in the cage. Actually fingers poked through the grid would have been an impossible reach for the rats.

Years later I saw similar exhibitions on both circus and carnival midways, as the "scourge of our boys" in Korea and Vietnam.

Another pictorial habitat was the sewers of Paris. The art work fronting the pit had a *Phantom of the Opera* theme to it. The last time I saw a giant rat show the theme was "Terrors of Underground Moscow" sewers and the actually-immaculate Russian subway was depicted as the grimy, dimly-lit habitat of our subject exhibit. Today the sewers of Bagdad or possibly Havana might be an appropriate setting for the banners.

What were these orange-toothed and rat-tailed creatures? They were actually giant rats, not a breed, but, a true species. However, they were hardly the horrific man eaters depicted on the banners. Their true habitat was far more different than that implied by the showmen. The rodent's scientific name is *Myocotor Coypu*, sometimes called the Swamp Beaver or Nutvig in the fur trade. They are native only to Central and South America.

They are found in an aquatic environment as indicated by their webbed hind feet. Their marketable pelts have long yellow to reddish-brown guard hairs. The dense underfur is slate colored and very soft. From head to rump they are 430 to 635 m.m. with an additional tail length of 255 to 425 m.m.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbit pellets, vegetables, apples and bread are an acceptable captive diet. They may have as many as three litters a year and nine pups a litter, a very rat-like level of fecundity.<sup>2</sup>

In the late forties and early fifties these creatures were marketed as a cottage industry by fur farms. Advertise-



The rat show on Gopher Davenport's Dailey Bros. Circus in 1974. John Polacsek photo.

ments for breeding stock appeared in magazines like *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Science* classified sections. After the market for breeding stock had been saturated, disposal of young became a problem as the fur trade showed only a minor interest in the pelts. Feed was inexpensive, but housing was not. This hobby for profit turned out to be profitable only for breeding stock suppliers. This has become a common occurrence. We saw similar situations a few years later with hamsters and chinchillas. It would appear that llama farms and emu fac-

Bobby Gibbs and his rat show on Carson & Barnes in 1982. They were claimed to be radioactive "victims of Chernobyl." John Polacsek photo.



tories are headed in the same direction. Reports of hobbyists turning these loose on an unwary public are starting.

The unprofitable situation with coypu might have led to their release into the swampy areas of the Southeastern United States where they have proven to be an environmental problem. They eat the native vegetation and dig into river and stream banks, destroying food and habitat for indigenous wild life. They have been condemned by water management officials for wrecking dikes, levees and earthen dams. A



The rat show on Fisher Bros. Circus in 1978. Bill Rhodes photo.

bounty situation may now have to be implanted to solve the problem in Louisiana, Georgia and Florida's delicate swamp areas. They are delicious when cooked over a charcoal spit as the author found out in his hand-to-mouth days as a zoo keeper. Being a mostly vegetarian, highly aquatic animal, it could hopefully overcome its "man eating giant rat" designation, becoming food for man instead.

#### Notes

1. *Mammals of the World*, Ernest P. Walker, Vol. II, p. 10. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1964.

2. *Management of Wild Mammals in Captivity*, Lee S. Crandall, p. 258. University of Chicago Press, 1968.



# SIDE LIGHTS ON THE CIRCUS BUSINESS

## PART THREE

By David W. Watt

September 14, 1912

For several years with the Forepaugh show a young man by the name of Harry Everts [Evarts?] was press agent during the summer and at the close of the season would go on to Chicago and act as press agent for the Kohl and Middleton Museum. In the spring I would join him in Chicago, and we would go down to Philadelphia to the show together.

The spring of the terrible railroad accident at Ashtabula, Ohio, he had made arrangements to go on with me, and I left Chicago two weeks before the accident. Kohl and Middleton wanted him to stay as long as he could, and as there was no particular work for him to do till the show opened, he concluded to stay with them as long as possible. Harry left Chicago on the ill-fated train and lost his life in the wreck. He was pinned in between some seats and timbers with only one hand loose, and he was crushed and burned to death. His wife had died two years before and left him with a boy about eight years of age who lived in Buffalo with his wife's mother.

Persons who were fortunate enough to escape tried in every way to release him, but to no avail. Just before he died he happened to think of a life insurance policy of \$5,000 which he had taken out for the boy and had in his little grip at his side. As one of the persons grabbed the grip and pulled it out of the fire, the last thing poor Harry said was, "Look for the life insurance." On opening his valise they found the \$5,000 policy there made out for his son.

Harry Everts was a high class newspaper man, never without work and always commanding a big salary. Few men in the show busi-

ness had more friends or were better known.

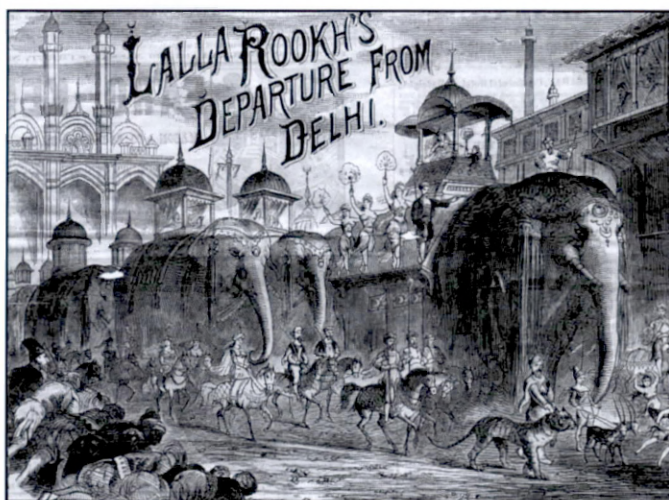
Late in the season of this year we took in some of the principal towns in the south and on a Saturday showed in Atlanta, Georgia. Back in the war of the rebellion I had an older brother killed a mile and a half in front of Atlanta who later was taken to Marietta and buried there in the national cemetery. Saturday evening I had a talk with the landlord in the hotel at Atlanta and asked him if it would be possible for me to go over to Marietta and spend the day there, which was Sunday, and get over to Rome, Georgia Sunday night. He looked over the railroad guide and told me that I could get a train Sunday morning from Atlanta going up to Marietta which was only 20 miles, and I got a train out of Marietta at four o'clock in the evening for Rome, Georgia. I said nothing to anyone around the show but locked up the wagon Saturday night, went to the hotel and stayed overnight and took the eight o'clock

train to Marietta. Arriving there I went to the national cemetery, met the superintendent and was his guest for the day. At four o'clock he drove into town and I took the train, as I supposed, for Rome. About 8 o'clock in the evening the conductor said, "Everybody out, this is as far as we go." I said to him, "Is this Rome, Georgia?" He said, "No sir, this is eighteen miles from Rome."

It was about the middle of November, quite cold and rainy. There were not more than a dozen houses in this town and a little hotel and no chance for me to get over to Rome. There was a train going over the next day at one o'clock, but I had to be there at nine o'clock in the morning. About ten o'clock a typical Southerner came into the little hotel and he and the landlord talked a while. He came over to me and said that Colonel so and so in the town had a pony and open buggy. He said, "I don't reckon mister that it is much of a rig, but if I can borrow it, I will be glad to take you down the mountains to Rome." In about half an hour he arrived with a little, old, rickety buggy and a small, old pony that had seen better days. The landlord gave us an umbrella and we started down

through the mountains for Rome. We would first hit on one side and get onto the road and go for a short distance when we would get out of the road again. My newly made friend said to me, "There is something wrong here. I've got a spark under the seat, and I will get out and see what's the matter." He went under the seat and pulled out the lantern and went around in front of the buggy and looked it over and said, "I'm afraid we are in bad shape. Our

Courier illustration for the 1881 Forepaugh spec Lalla Rookh. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise noted.





headlights are both out."

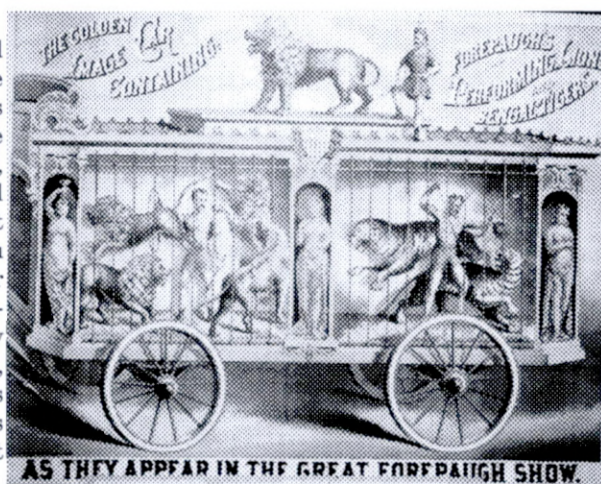
But we pushed on toward Rome after going down the mountains for about six miles when we heard the terrible roar of water. I said to him, "Now don't drive into that until we find out something about how deep it is." He said, "You set very easy, sir, very easy, for I know every foot of this country and this is only a dry stream." "Well," I said to him, "that may be all right in this country. When water makes such a noise up north we don't call it a dry stream."

But he assured me it would be all right and drove in. The water came up in the body of the buggy, but the pony took us through and we started up a steep incline on the other side. But the soil was all wet clay. After going about half way up, the pony commenced to slip and we started back into the water. My friend jumped off the buggy and told me to keep driving and he pushed the buggy till we finally landed on top of the hill.

He said to me, "This is certainly quite an experience," for it was raining hard all the time. I said to him, "Yes, if anybody had told me back in the early sixties that I ever would come down at midnight in the Georgia woods with a rebel, I would not have believed it." "Well," he said, you Yankees was making it very uncomfortable for us about that time."

But we started on for Rome and just as it commenced to break daylight in the morning, we drove up in front of the hotel and told the landlord we wanted a warm room where we could dry our clothes and call us at nine and have two good breakfasts ready for us. After breakfast we went out on the street and I said to him, "I am not going to allow you to drive this pony back. I am going to send you back on the train. Show me the first man you see that you can depend on and I will hire him to take the pony back."

About that time he called a young colored boy from across the street and he said to me, "There is a boy that is thoroughly reliable." I asked the boy what he would charge me for taking Colonel so and so's pony back



Adam Forepaugh lithograph used in the 1880s. Howard Tibbals collection.

home, and with a twinkle in his eye he said, "Boss it would be just the same as walking." And I agreed with him and gave him \$3 to drive the pony back home.

I took my new southern friend on down to the show where he had dinner and supper with me at the cook tent. I introduced him to everybody around the show and he stayed with me till 12 o'clock that night. When he bade me good-bye he said, "If I live to be forty years older, I will never forget last night and today. This has certainly been an experience I can never forget. If you ever want to send any roses or flowers of any kind to be placed on your brother's grave, send them to me and I will plant them tenderly as one friend should for another." But the train pulled out and I have never seen nor heard from him since, and the show closed its season there at Rome, Georgia.

### September 21, 1912

Thinking perhaps that a few incidents that happened at different times while I was in the business might be interesting to the reader, I will give you a few that actually happened.

At Gloversville, N.Y., while loading the train in the evening, one of the big animal cages, which in one end held three lions and the other two leopards, was tipped over while lifting it up onto the cars. The top of the cage broke loose and the entire five animals escaped. There were hundreds of people watching the loading of the train, and they all scattered in

different directions. In a minute there was nobody to be seen but the workmen on the show. But the animals seemed to be frightened fully as bad as the people and were only looking for some place to crawl into. The entire five huddled together under the sleeper, one of which I was occupying and fast asleep.

The workmen soon gathered ties and piled them up around the car and then got long ropes and made loops on the ends. One at a time, as fast as they could get them, the animals were dragged from beneath the car and put back into another cage. This work continued until the next morning before they got the last one. I knew nothing of what happened till I got up at 6 o'clock in the morning and saw that we were still in the same town. No one was hurt and no damage done except to the big cage. We had an 85 mile run out of there and it was well nigh noon before we reached the next town.

Late in the season the same year we showed in Akron, Ohio. After the parade had gone back to the show grounds, Mr. Forepaugh's coachman drove up to the side of the ticket wagon and waited for him. In a few minutes he came to the ticket wagon and told me that he was going to have company for dinner and that he had made arrangements for four and wanted me to be one of them. He said, "I will go down town now and get my other two guests and we will drive here to the ticket wagon."

About noon he arrived and with him were two ladies about 60 years of age who had formerly lived neighbor to his people in Philadelphia. One of these ladies' given name was Elizabeth, and after we had sat down to dinner Mr. Forepaugh said, "Dave, Lib and I used to be pretty sweet on each other when I was working in the butcher shop, but," he said, "about the time we were 14 or 15 years of age her father, who was in the iron molding business, came west to Akron, Ohio, and although we wrote occasionally, I never saw Lib again until I came through here with the show."

I said to her, "You are probably one customer at least that got good



weight at this particular butcher shop."

"Well," she said, "I don't know as to that. You know Adam and I weren't thinking so much about good weights at that time."

These two women were the only two left of the family, but the father had prospered in business and left them well fixed with a fine home and good business property which brought them good rentals. Adam Forepaugh always had a soft spot in his heart for these girls, as he called them, and they were always his guests when he showed in Akron. This day was one of the few that he missed being at the front door or in the ticket wagon counting up the day's receipts.

I want to tell you something about a man who once made his home in Janesville for many years, and in his line of work he was the highest class man that I ever knew. His name was Spencer Alexander, better known here as elsewhere by the name of Delavan. He was what was known in the show business as the boss hostler. He hired and discharged all his own drivers and in the winter when they were writing for engagements, the minute he would see the man's name signed, he would either throw it in the waste basket and say, "He's no good" or he would say, "There is a high class man. Send for him to come on."

He was the finest buyer and seller that I ever knew and last of all, although not a graduate, he was a veterinary surgeon. Taking all of these qualities, they meant a great deal in the business. A year ago last fall, which is just the year before he died, the Ringlings sent him to Europe. They sent an interpreter with him, supplied him with plenty of money and a letter of credit that read like this, "We will honor any draft or check drawn on us for any amount by our representative Spencer Alexander." This letter was in a Morocco case with a print of the five Ringlings at the head.

To give you an idea of how high class this man was he searched Europe all over, spent several thousand dollars of their money looking for anything that would be a feature in this country to draw the people to the show, but he could not find any-



Spencer Alexander, circus boss hostler.

thing that looked good to him, so after more than three months of travel and spending thousands of dollars, he returned home empty handed and said to the Ringling brothers, "We have better trained animals of all kinds in this country and better features for the two great shows than there can be found anywhere in Europe."

A little later just the day before the show was to close, Delavan was taken sick and died very suddenly, only living a few hours. And this ended the career of the greatest man in his line of work that I ever knew. A few weeks ago when I visited the show in Rockford Al Ringling said to me, "I don't expect the show will look natural to you with Delavan gone and it don't seem to us, for Delavan had grown to be one of the stand-bys here and his place will be hard to fill."

Many years ago in Germantown, Philadelphia which was the winter quarters for the Forepaugh show, there was born a baby lion and in later years it grew to one of the largest in captivity. Both in winter quarters and on the road, this lion had been handled by all the different animal men and was one of the kindest and easiest managed of any that they had ever had. They named him Germantown after the name of the winter quarters.

One day in the menagerie while the parade was out—for there were always a few cages of the animals left in the menagerie that did not go out

in the parade—while one of the animal men opened his cage door to clean out the cage, old Germantown in a second jumped over his head and was loose, walking around in the menagerie. He started to walk out of the tent at the front door, but instead of going out, followed the laps around and finally walked into the menagerie again. Near the front door he had walked within two feet of Adam Forepaugh who was sitting in a big easy chair reading a newspaper. Old Germantown, as he was called, strolled around in the menagerie for a few minutes, and a keeper brought a big box about four feet square and set it down in front of him, and he walked into it and laid down. The animal men quickly put a board across the side and raised it up to the door of the cage, and the lion walked into his old quarters again without doing any damage. Jack Forepaugh who was boss animal man and a brother of Adam told me years afterward that Adam died without ever knowing that old Germantown ever escaped from his cage.

#### September 28, 1912

In '86 we showed in Topeka, Kansas, and this year we had 29 elephants with the show. Among this number there were five or six that were not always on their good behavior and consequently were not allowed out in a parade. They were left on the lot and chained to stakes and a man left in charge to see that no one got near them. But while the man that was in charge had his back turned, a boy about 9 years old got too close to one of them and he hit him with his trunk, breaking his leg above the ankle. He was quickly taken to his home only a few blocks away and the doctor sent for. Mr. Forepaugh heard the news and came to the ticket wagon and said to me, "Take my horse and carriage and go to the boy's home and make some kind of a settlement with them. If it's simply a straight fracture, he will soon be over it, and you ought to settle it for \$200 or \$300 at the outside. Don't go over \$300 at the best."

I found the house, but a lawyer had got there ahead of me and told the father who was a working man that he would take the case for half and that we would take in at least



\$20,000 in Topeka that day and would be glad to give it up rather than to stand a lawsuit. The doctor had set the limb and told the father and mother that he would have the boy walking in two months and that there was no question but what it would be all right.

I talked with them for a long time and as I found it was impossible to settle for any such amount as Mr. Forepaugh had set, I finally offered them \$1,000 and to pay the doctor's bill. The doctor was a fine man, one of the nicest I ever met and did all he could to get them to take it. But their advisor said, "No, I will attach the entire show and he will give you a good settlement before they get out of town."

I went back to the show and reported to Mr. Forepaugh what I had offered them and he said to me, "Dave, if you had ever paid them \$1,000 and the doctor's bill, I would have charged it all to you except the \$300. When I send a man to do anything for me and give him his orders, I want him to work to the line and not go over it."

I said to him, "Governor, this line of work is outside of what is expected of me, but anytime when you think I am the man to go and make a settlement, I will have to be allowed to use my own judgment to a certain extent. I found that conditions were altogether different from what you expected, and I also knew that \$1,000 and the doctor's bill was far better than a long drawn-out lawsuit."

He told me to go uptown and find him a good lawyer. George R. Peck, who formerly lived there and at that time was one of the best lawyers in the west, was the first one for me to look for. I immediately went to his office and there I found George Kimball, nephew of Mr. Peck, in the office and now a resident of this city. George told me Mr. Peck was in Kansas City on some business and would not return for three or four days. He recommended me to another firm. I drove them down to the grounds and Mr. Forepaugh gave them the facts in the case and told them he would fight it to a finish.

The show was attached for \$20,000. Adam [Allen] Sells, one of the famous Sells brothers, had

retired from the circus business and lived in Topeka. I went and got Mr. Sells and told him that I wanted him to go on Mr. Forepaugh's bond for \$20,000, and when the judge asked me for a bondsman, I said to him that Adam [Allen] Sells would go on Mr. Forepaugh's bond. The judge said, "Mr. Sells, how much are you worth?"

"Well," Mr. Sells said, "I am worth at least \$300,000."

The stem judge looked over his glasses at Mr. Sells and said, "Where is it?"

"Well, judge," Mr. Sells said, "I have my horse and buggy at the door, and if you will get in with me, I can show you most of it right here in Topeka. I own both of the two first class hotels of the city. I own so many stores in such a block and so many in another."

The judge said, "You needn't go any farther. The bond is good."

When we got ready to leave Topeka that night I said to Mr. Forepaugh, "I am going to take Mr. Sells with me tonight for I am satisfied the show will be attached again tomorrow."

He said to me, "You needn't worry about that. This bond of \$20,000 that you have put up is all that is necessary."

But we had a 75 mile run from there and nobody in the next town that we knew in case they should make us any further trouble, so I prevailed on Mr. Sells to go through with us.

Everything went smoothly the next day until we were loading the

William Allen Sells, the lesser known Sells brother.



train at night and then the entire show was attached for \$20,000 more, which bond Mr. Sells also signed, and then we got a stay of proceedings on account of malicious prosecution. They were trying to tie us up to get a settlement. This lawsuit was a long, drawn-out one, several witnesses having to be sent from Philadelphia. When it came to an end the boy was awarded \$1,000, which he only got half of and out of that had to pay the doctor. But while the boy only received \$1,000, it cost Adam Forepaugh before he got a settlement over \$5,000. After that when I made any settlements for him, there were no ropes tied to me and he always told me to go and do the best I could, but make a settlement if possible.

This Adam [Allen] Sells was one of the four brothers who were famous in circus business thirty years ago, but they are all dead now, the show falling into the hands of the Ringlings. The only blood relation of all of the Sells that is living is a daughter of Peter Sells who is married and lives in Columbus, Ohio, but no one is living who bears the name of the Sells who were famous for so many years in the show business.

In last week's article I spoke of Spencer Alexander, the boss hostler for so many years with Ringling Bros. who died in Arkansas the day before the show closed. His remains were brought to Baraboo and buried in the family lot, and the funeral was one of the largest ever held in Baraboo. Hundreds of show people from all over the country came to the funeral, and the floral offerings were the finest ever seen there. The Ringling brothers sent a blanket of roses from Chicago which covered the entire casket.

Spencer Alexander had a family of three children, one daughter and two sons. They had all grown up, the daughter being married, and had all gone for themselves, so that the bread winner and head of the family was gone. The show had just put in winter quarters the day of the funeral, and immediately after the funeral the Ringling boys got together in the office and they said, "Now we must take care of Maggie," meaning Delavan's wife. She was living in one of their houses and they carried there a check for \$10,000 and pre-



sented it to her and told her as far as the house was concerned for her to stay there as long as she wanted to if she saw fit. The firms that will use the wives of their deceased employees like this are not many, and while the reader may say, "They could well afford to," there are many in this world who could afford to that do not. Haven't you found it so?

### October 5, 1912

*In this week's tales from the "White Tops," Mr. Watt dwells upon two side issues which perhaps are not exactly relevant to the subject of circuses as a whole, but which tell a tale all their own of the morbid curiosity of the general public. Mr. Watt was in St. Joseph, Mo., shortly after the death of the notorious Jesse James and writes, not from hearsay evidence, but from actual experience.*

In eighteen and eighty the show opened in Washington, D.C. for three days, and after making all the principal cities in the East, started west and along early in September showed in St. Joseph, Missouri. We arrived in St. Joe early Sunday morning and showed there on Sunday. All the people in those days were put up at hotels and all our show people were quartered at a large hotel built in the suburbs of St. Joseph, a high class family hotel.

On Thursday morning, which was only three days before we arrived there, the notorious Jesse James had been killed by one of his famous band by the name of Robert Ford. There were two of the Ford brothers, Robert and Charlie. They had been members of the Jesse James band of outlaws for some years, and for some time the governor of Missouri had offered a reward of \$10,000 for the capture dead or alive of Jesse James. The Ford brothers, although they had been partners in many of their supposed bank robberies in many different states, the \$10,000 offered by the government of Missouri had seemed to tempt them for a long time. On this Thursday morning in the Jesse James home in St. Joe, Mo., while



The side show personnel of the Cole Younger and Frank James Wild West show in 1903.

Jesse James was standing on an old wooden chair hanging a picture on the wall, Robert Ford shot him from behind. It was always supposed that the two brothers received the reward for their treachery to one who had always befriended them.

The home of Jesse James was a small, one-story house standing on a hill about 30 rods northwest of the World's Hotel. There was a good sized living room, 3 bedrooms and a good sized kitchen which served also as a dining room, and a woodshed that constituted the entire house. A little to the north stood a one-story barn in which Jesse James kept two thoroughbred saddle horses which were never without their saddles on them at night. This they claimed was done in case of emergency so that he could make a quick escape.

A widow woman owned the property and the James' had lived there about a year under an assumed name. I have forgotten the name they went under at that time, but the man who had charge of the billiard room in the billiards hall said that nearly every morning about 9:30 he would come down there and play billiards with him till noon. The landlord of the hotel said that they often talked it over and wondered what his business was as he always seemed to have plenty of money.

As soon as the news spread that the noted bandit had been killed, the old lady owning the property came and took charge of it, put guards outside the fence and charged an admission of 25 cents to see the room in

which he was killed and the surroundings. The Sunday that we were there it was said that upwards to 5,000 people paid admission to see the place. For miles around people drove there in all kinds of vehicle to take a look at the home of Jesse James.

His father was a Baptist minister and early in the Civil war he joined the rebel forces and afterwards joined Quantrill's famous band of guerrillas. It has always been said that the Ford brothers who killed him had little good out of the \$10,000 reward which they received, for it was not many years later that Charles was killed out in the far west and Robert, the brother who shot James, took his own life not so many years after.

Frank James, the brother of Jesse and who was with him through all his desperate work, later went to Nevada, Mo. There he went to work in a grocery store. Two years after we showed in Nevada, Frank and his wife came to the show in the afternoon. We had a newspaper man with the show by the name of Young who was a bright, smart writer but occasionally would imbibe too freely. This was the case in Nevada and after he had quite a visit with Frank

James and his wife at the show in the afternoon, he went down to their house in the evening with foolscap paper enough under this arm to write a history of the world and half a dozen pencils sharpened on both ends and insisted on Frank James telling him his life's career in full. Frank James was nice to him, but sent word up to the show for someone to come down and look after him. Young was sent for and taken to the hotel.

Frank James was a small man with a kindly face, a very pleasant man to meet and the last one that you would pick out to be such a desperate character. A few years later the notorious Bunk Allen, who died last week in Chicago and of whom the Inter-Ocean had so much in last Sunday's issue of the paper, started a



circus on the road and Frank James and Cole Younger, another one of the famous band, were taken with the show as the drawing card. The contract called for equal dividends of all proceeds among the four, the two partners and Jesse James and Cole Younger. It was not long before James and Younger knew that they were not getting what belonged to them. At the time the Luella Forepaugh-Fish show was sold here, Bunk Allen came on to buy some property. At the same time, his partner went ahead of the show. Both the partners being gone, Frank James and Cole Younger went out to the ticket wagon and told the ticket agent to open up the safe. This he did, and they took \$13,700 out of the safe and both left for Missouri and quit the show business for good. They both claimed that this amount did not any more than give them what rightfully belonged to them. It is fair to say that they did not ask for any further settlement.

This man Allen had been known for more than 30 years by the name of Bunk Allen, but these names were both like the man; they were counterfeits. His name was neither Bunk nor was it Allen. He was raised on a farm near Delavan only 16 miles from here, and before he was out of his teens, he left the farm and went direct to Chicago. Shortly after his arrival in Chicago he went into the saloon business and made money from the start. He was a fine looking man, standing 6 feet 2 inches and weighing over 200. Last week he died leaving a widow with a large fortune which was tainted with everything that was vile, and but few friends had a good word for him.

#### October 12, 1912

*There is no more interesting reading than to hear of men who started as poor boys and became rich men before they died. Not only rich men, but men whose employees love them and honor their money. During Mr. Watts' long service with the "White Tops" he came in contact with some of the top notchers in the circus business. Drilling in the school of Adam Forepaugh, he met Barnum, Bailey, Cole and Hutchinson, the quartet of the big showmen who owned and controlled the great rival of the Fore-*



Henry E. Allott, a.k.a. Bunk Allen, owner of the Younger and James show.

*paugh circus. Mr. Wait this week tells a bit of inside history of these men, lines that teach their own lesson. Showmen from boyhood, they died wealthy or are enjoying a ripe old age in prosperity. It is a little lesson in itself aside from being mighty interesting reading.*

Thinking that it might be interesting to the average reader to know something about the history or, in other words, the start and the finish of some of the people who became famous in circus business, I will try to give you something along that line. In the early seventies a middle-aged woman by the name of Cole got together a small show in a small town in Iowa and started it out as a wagon show under the name of W. W. Cole. "Mother Cole," as she was familiarly known around the show, was a widow, and W. W. Cole whose name the show bore was her only child, and at that time, barely out of his teens and fresh from school. The show was started in a small way, but under "Mother Cole's" management, it constantly grew both in size and popularity with the public. W. W. Cole, the son, was not long in the business before he became an able assistant to his mother.

The show constantly grew and not many years later it had grown too large for a road show and cars were bought, and it was launched out as a railroad show. It was not many years later before the W. W. Cole show was

a dangerous rival of the great Adam Forepaugh and the P. T. Barnum shows, but in the earlier days of the show, the Coles were smart enough to know that there was plenty of country and consequently kept away from the two great shows and every year wound up with a good big balance to the good.

A few years later when it was known by the Barnum people that the Cole show was getting to be a dangerous rival, they called Mr. Cole to New York to make a deal to take over the Cole show and W. W. Cole to take an interest in the Barnum show. Mr. Cole immediately became one of the active managers and directors of the great Barnum show and today is living at 13 West 27th Street, New York City and is probably the wealthiest of all the great showmen of the early days.

W. W. Cole, early in his career of show business, as soon as he could get a good bank account would invest his money in business property in New York City. I knew of some investments he had made there more than thirty years ago. Only a few days ago in looking over some old papers I ran across a letter which he wrote me in '98. The following is the letter: "13 West 27th St., Barnum & Bailey, New York, Feb. 10, 1898.

"D. W. Watt, Esq., Dear Sir: Your letter received after I wired you. Your telegram received. The position referred to would be as representing of Bailey and Cole with the "Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros.. Show." Mr. Bailey cabled me stating that we should have a man there next season in place of George Starr who was there only part of last season and recommended you for the position.

"Mr. T. L. Evans was there as book-keeper and auditor and is to be there next season. He is at Columbus now and is engaged by the year. You would be there by the season commencing the latter part of April at Columbus, Ohio. The details of your duties I am unable to state. Mr. Bailey will give us particulars in time knowing as he does just what they would be.

"Give me your views as to salary if you are inclined to accept and I will cable Mr. Bailey to advise you quickly. Yours truly, W. W. Cole."

But of this nothing came and I



never went back into the business.

James A. Bailey and W. W. Cole, who were associated together for so many years in the business, were two of the cleanest men that I ever knew. Every promise that they made either to the public, to the performer or to the workingman was always fulfilled to the letter. That last time that the Barnum show was here, which I think was four years ago under the management of James A. Bailey, I had a long talk with him, and in the conversation I said, "Mr. Bailey, why don't you get out of the business?" "Well," he said, "it would look as though it was time. I'll be 70 years old my next birthday and I started in the business before I was of age, so I have been in the business for more than 50 years."

"But," he said, "Dave, I could not be satisfied away from the show. It's grown to be part of my life and there are many reasons why I should not quit. In the first place I have been busy so long that I could not bear to be idle. And then there are many men here with the show who have been with me from 20 to 30 years and to break up the show would seem to me like turning out my family. So probably I will die in the harness."

As he said in a little more than six months from that time while the show was going on in Madison Square Garden, James A. Bailey died at his home on the Hudson River. And the show only missed one performance and that was the matinee of the day of the funeral.

This ended the career of one of the greatest men that I ever knew in the show business in more than one way. James A. Bailey was of a kind disposition and always was ready to listen to the woes or troubles of a workingman as he was those of an agent holding the highest position around the show. I heard him say once that he had got many a good idea of the business from workingmen.

Another man who was a partner for many years of the Barnum and Bailey show was James L. Hutchinson. "Jim," as he was called, was raised on a farm in Illinois and in the early seventies went to a nearby town to see the great show. He made up his mind that he wanted to travel with the show and immediately went to work looking for a posi-



William Washington Cole, in a previously unpublished photograph, probably from the 1880s. Howard Tibbals collection.

tion. He was finally hired as a canvasser on the side show. This was the first year that Barnum's life was published in book form and put on sale with the show. The book found ready sale and thousands of copies were sold daily. The show bought blue suits with brass buttons and put twelve men into the suits to sell Barnum's life.

James L. Hutchinson was one of the workingmen put at this work. They all got a percentage of their sales and Hutchinson proved to be one of the best. He not only made a lot of money on the side this year, but also saved all his salary. He was not only a money maker, but knew how to take care of it.

He had saved money enough that year and showed business ability enough so that the coming year he got an interest in the privileges and three years later he saved money enough to buy an interest in the big show. So you can readily see that it was only four years from the time Jim Hutchinson left the farm till he was a part owner in the great Barnum show [actually longer].

Later in the nineties [1887] he sold out his interest in the show to his partners and retired. It was said when he retired that he was worth between three and four million. He died about two years ago in New York City leaving a widow and two chil-

dren and a fortune that he added quite a little to since retiring from the show business.

#### October 19, 1912

Back in the early eighties when the bitter warfare was going on between the Barnum and Bailey and the Adam Forepaugh show, people of all kinds who were well up in the business could demand larger salaries than at any other time. Both shows were anxious to get the best both in agents and performers and, in fact, in any line pertaining to the circus business. The white elephant season [1884] was the one season when agents and performers got their own prices.

That year Adam Forepaugh engaged what was known in those days as the "Big Trio." J. E. Warner, whose home was in Lansing, Michigan, was general agent and supposed to be the best general man ahead of a circus in the country. He was a high class man in every way, owned a beautiful home there in Lansing and several times before and since has been mayor of the city. William Durand, whose home was in Indianapolis, was the newspaperman. He wrote all the small bills and got out all of the advertisements during the winter for the coming season. He also had a reputation of being the best man in his line of work in the United States. The other man was Charles Fuller. Charlie Fuller's home was in New York and he was the railroad contracting agent. He knew all the superintendents and when the show would be coming, his headquarters for two or three months at a time would be in Chicago. Here he could contract for all of his western business for almost the entire season. His work would usually close early in October and he would have nothing more to do until he would commence work again for the coming season.

These three men for their services the year of the white elephant were paid \$7000 each and all expenses. But along in September of that year peace was declared between the two great shows and the country was divided. One of the shows would stay east for a season and the other in the west and then alternate the next season. After this was done it put an end to the big salaries to a certain extent.



This was the last season that J. E. Warner represented the show, and Fuller, the railroad contracting agent, stayed but one year after that. Bill Durand stayed with the show, I think, two years longer and one morning after leaving his home in Indianapolis, he walked over to the depot to take a train and suddenly dropped dead on the depot platform. Durand was a great writer and knew the business thoroughly from one end to the other. In the winter in a great printing house he would order his own paper for the entire season and so close would he make his figures that little or nothing was left over for the next season.

James A. Bailey for the Barnum show and Adam Forepaugh for the Forepaugh show drew up articles and signed them, dividing the country for five years. This was done in the ticket wagon of the Forepaugh show early in September on the show grounds at State and 22nd Street in Chicago. I have forgotten just the date, but I was one of the witnesses of the contract.

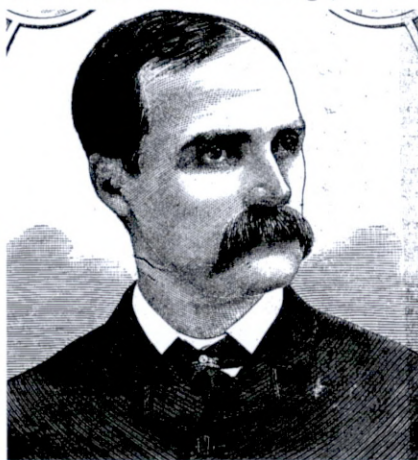
This season while we were coming west all the way from Philadelphia to Chicago, the Barnum show was behind us, hiring new lots and building new billboards at anywhere from 50 to 100 percent more than the cost would have been had the shows divided the country before. While both shows were taking in a world of money, there was little or nothing left after the enormous expenses were paid.

The next season Mr. Fuller's contract expired and a man by the name of Mike Doyle took his place and did all the railroad contracting for the show up to the time Mr. Forepaugh died. Mike Doyle proved to be one of the best contractors in the country and stayed with the Forepaugh and Buffalo Bill shows up till about three years ago. I think he did all the railroad contracting for both shows for something like 22 years when he retired and is still living with a maiden sister in Syracuse, New York.

Mr. Durand's place in the newspaper work was taken by W. E. Coxey who was then quite a young man and circus business was new to him. He stayed with the show for some years and later got into magazine work and

with his family is now living in the suburbs of Chicago. J. E. Warner's place as general agent was filled by Louis E. Cooke whose home is in Newark, New Jersey, a suburb of New York, where he owns one of the finest homes in the city. Mr. Cooke always liked the business and from that time on was general agent with the Forepaugh and Barnum shows till after the time they were sold to the Ringlings, and then he went to the Buffalo Bill show and is still general agent for that show.

E. J. Lehman, the original founder of the Fair Store in Chicago, at that



James L. Hutchinson, circus manager.

privileges of the Adam Forepaugh show and after two or three years of successful business with the show, he sold out and bought a small store in Chicago where the great Fair Store is now located. Mr. Lehman died several years ago, but the business is still carried on by the widow and his two sons. Mr. Lehman was always a good friend to the show people and many a time his influence and his money has helped many a man out of Chicago and on the road to success.

I left the Forepaugh show at Peru, Ind., once on a Thursday and came through to Chicago to see if I could get a permit to open a sideshow on the lakefront on Sunday. We were to open the following Monday there for two weeks' engagement, but up to that time no show has been allowed to show in Chicago on Sunday under canvas on the lakefront.

I went to Mr. Lehman's office in the great Fair Store and told him what I wanted. He called a carriage and we

started out, and in less than two hours, we were back in his office and he had fixed everything so that I could open a sideshow on the lakefront Sunday morning. This I did, and the receipts were the largest in the history of the sideshow. Mr. Lehman was always ready to do a good turn for a friend and but few people in those days had more influence in Chicago than E. J. Lehman.

These are simply a few happenings along the road as I found them at different times while in the business, and I thought they might be interesting to you.

#### October 26, 1912

In the winter of eighteen hundred and eighty and eighty-one, Adam Forepaugh had European agents all over Europe looking for anything that would be a feature for the show the coming season of eighty-one. Although they spent thousands of dollars looking for something in the way of a novelty that would not only draw the mass of the people, but be a feature well worth looking at, they failed to find anything that they thought was worth bringing to this country.

For several years a newspaper man whose home was in Norwich, Connecticut, had been press agent with the show. His name was Charles H. Day and he was considered one of the best men in the business. Charlie, as he was familiarly known with the show, got an idea one day that to advertise for the handsomest woman in the world, whose salary would be \$10,000 for the season, would certainly be a drawing card. He talked this over with Mr. Forepaugh, but it was some days before Mr. Day could make Mr. Forepaugh think that this was the thing to do. But they finally advertised in the Philadelphia and New York papers, saying that Adam Forepaugh would give \$10,000 for the coming season for the handsomest woman in the world to travel with his show, and he would have a committee of three men at his main office in Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, who would make the final decision and pick out the woman whom they deemed would fill the place.

They wanted all those who could to



make application in person and those that could not to write letters and send their photographs. Letters and photographs came by the thousands, not only from the United States, but from all over Europe. Finally a young lady by the name of Louise Montague was selected as the one. Louise Montague had been in theatrical business for a few years and was not only handsome in face and figure, but was one of the brightest and smartest women that I ever knew. Her duties consisted of riding in the parade and sitting on a platform built for her in the menagerie. She always had 25 of the best reserved seats at her disposal in the big show where she entertained her friends and the press. You would many times hear old ladies say that if Mary or if Jane so-and-so had the fine clothes that this woman had, they would be just as good looking as she was, but in the whole season you never heard a newspapermen say so.

And in her case the old adage held true that "handsome is as handsome does." The press all over the country was anxious to interview her and she was certainly an entertainer and knew how. When it would come close to time for the big show to start, the newspapermen with their families would try to get away from her and say, "We will see you later." Louise would always say to them, "Now you have animal books, brick popcorn and some nice reserved seats." They would thank her and say, "We have plenty of reserved seats," and in answer Louise would say, "you haven't any like mine." She would keep them with her and take them in the big show.

She would see that the children all had animal books, brick popcorn and everything of that kind that the children like and which naturally went with the circus. After the performance was over she would always have a little one in her arms and walk clear out to the main street with them, and all the time she would be telling them what a beautiful town Janesville was or Madison or LaCrosse or whatever town they might be showing in.

She proved to be the greatest card that the show had ever seen, and Mr.



Louise Montague, known as the \$10,000 beauty.

Forepaugh closed the season which was always known as the beauty season with three quarters of a million to the good after all expenses were paid. Louise stayed with the show a part of the next season and then concluded to go to Europe to study the stage. This she did and later came back to this country and only a short time after married a prominent lawyer in New York where they made their home for several years.

About five or six years ago I was in Chicago and stopped at the Windsor Clifton Hotel where a friend of mine by the name of George Cummings was manager. I had no more than registered when George said to me, "Dave, who do you think called in the hotel a few days ago and told me that if you ever came to the city, she wanted you to be sure and see her?"

He tried to make me guess who it was, but as I could not, he said to me, "It is your old friend Louise Montague, the \$10,000 beauty." She and her husband had moved to Chicago about a year before and she knew that Mr. Cummings and I were friends. I did not have time to go and visit her at that time, and it was only a little later till she was taken sick with pneumonia and died. She had one of the brightest, cheeriest natures that I ever knew, and as the

old saying goes, she wore a "smile that never came off." Louise was always as kind to the working people around the show as she was to the proprietor of the offices. Hundreds of circus people all over the country mourned her sudden death.

On May fourth, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, the Burr Robbins show opened the season in Janesville on a Saturday. A light drizzling rain fell all day, but in spite of this, the show did a big business. For weeks before the regular route of the show had been made out, an ambitious citizen of old Milton had tried hard at different times to have Col. Robbins show there on the following Monday. Mr. Robbins finally consented and the show went to Old Milton from Janesville. This man's name was Eliza Goodrich. Mr. Goodrich had lived there nearly all his life and was ambitious to have a circus and menagerie come to Milton. He furnished the show ground, the feed for all the stock and, I think if my memory serves me right, he fed the people there at his hotel on the corner. While the receipts were not the largest of the season, our expenses were very light and we pulled out of Milton Thursday morning for Whitewater with about \$650 to the good. Although Mr. Goodrich made but little or nothing out of the show, he had realized his ambition of bringing a circus and menagerie to Milton.

That season the show closed with about \$90,000 to the good. As we were out only about 140 days, you will readily see that Milton held its average with the balance of the towns for the season. So Burr Robbins never regretted that he showed in Milton.

To me these are pleasant memories of the past and I hope they may interest the reader.

#### November 2, 1912

*Old timers all remember Burr Robbins and his circus and love to recall the days when this city was the home of what was then one of the big tent shows of the country. D. W. Watt was for many years connected with the Robbins show and his story this week deals with the accident which happened to Mr. Robbins in 1880 when he nearly lost his life while rid-*



*ing in a launch on the Rock River.*

Shortly after the close of the season in eighteen hundred and seventy-nine Burr Robbins went to Chicago and ordered himself a steam launch for his own use on Rock River. It was to be delivered in Janesville soon after January the first of eighteen hundred and eighty. It arrived here on or about the fifteenth and was launched in Rock River near what was known as the Spring Brook winter quarters of the Burr Robbins circus.

On Sunday January the eighteenth my wife and myself were invited to the Burr Robbins home to take Sunday dinner. Mr. Robbins was very enthusiastic over his boat and said that after dinner we would all take a ride up the river to the city. Mrs. Robbins and my wife as well as myself declared that we had but little confidence in the captain and engineer. Mr. Robbins laughingly remarked, "I am to be the captain," and Richard Brooks better known as "Sailor Dick," the boss animal man, was to be the engineer.

After dinner was finished Mr. Robbins and myself went to the office which stood south of Eastern Avenue and there remained for some little time. While we were gone Mrs. Robbins ordered the coachman to bring a carriage, and Mrs. Robbins and my wife came uptown. This pleased Mr. Robbins and he said to me, "Now you will have to go on the boat or take a walk up the highway."

I said to him, "If it was 20 miles it would be the highway for me," and that I had but little confidence in either the captain or the engineer. The boat was a fine launch built in Chicago at the expense of about \$8.00. I walked uptown and Mr. Robbins and "Sailor Dick" came in the boat. They landed at the rear of the Helmstreet drug store which was located on North Main Street. Here they visited with friends until nearly 6 o'clock and when they started for home, it was quite dark.

The weather had been warm for several days and the melting of the snow had caused the river to rise all day rapidly. On their way home they passed safely under the Milwaukee Street bridge, but when they came to the Court Street bridge, it was different. Mr. Robbins was standing in the

front with his back to the bridge and directly in front of the smokestack of the boat. One of the timbers in the bridge struck the back of his head and drove it into the top of the smokestack cutting the upper portion of his nose off and separating the skull from the lower part of his face. The alarm was soon given and W. T. Van Kirk, a young man by the name of Blay, and Paul Young, who was then connected with the fire department, and others soon came to the rescue with ropes which were tied around Mr. Robbins and he was lifted to the bridge.

He was then put in a carriage and taken to the office of Dr. Palmer. The doctor examined him and told him he had but a short time to live, and if he had any business that he wished to look after, he should do so immediately. Mrs. Robbins who was at home in Spring Brook was sent for as was William Ruger, his attorney, who hurriedly drew his will.

After the will was drawn Mr. Ruger said to him, "Mr. Robbins, I will sign your name and you can touch the pen where I mark the cross." Mr. Robbins, although totally blind, said, "Mr. Ruger, place the pen in my hand and put it on the paper where you want my signature and I'll write Burr Robbins as well as I ever did."

He was then removed to the parlors of the Myers House where everyone including Dr. Palmer expected that every hour would be his last. Dr. Palmer removed many bones from his head, two of which were nearly, if not quite three quarters of an inch square. Strange as it may seem,

Willard Douglas Coxey, Forepaugh circus press agent.



there were but few hours from the time of the accident until his recovery that he lost consciousness.

He remained in the Myers House for several weeks. Peter Myers, the proprietor at that time closed up the main entrance which was on Main Street, and the only entrance to the hotel was on Milwaukee Street which was heavily carpeted to insure quiet. Many loads of shavings and sawdust were placed on the streets. Everything that was possible was done by his many friends for his comfort. About seven or eight weeks later he was removed to his home in Spring Brook and Dr. Palmer was given credit all over the country for performing one of the most difficult surgical operations of the time.

He continued to improve and on Saturday, May the first, the opening day of his show in Janesville, Burr Robbins was able to sit bolstered up in a carriage and with some friends headed the line of march. When the parade entered the business portion of the city, thousands of people cheered him all along the line as this was the first time they had seen him since the terrible accident.

He attended the performance of his show in the afternoon for a few minutes, and H. A. Patterson, then a prominent lawyer of this city, delivered an address of welcome and congratulated him on his narrow escape in behalf of the citizens of Janesville. He was then taken back to his home in Spring Brook and did not join the show till five or six weeks later.

This was my first year as manager of the show and Mrs. Robbins, who was one of the finest business women that I ever knew, took tickets at the main entrance every afternoon and evening.

Burr Robbins died about 3 years ago at his home on the North Shore Drive where his wife, one son and one daughter still make their home. A year ago Mrs. Robbins and her daughter, who is the wife of a prominent lawyer in Chicago, paid a visit to their old home and winter quarters in Spring Brook.

A few years later, after two different partners and changes in the management and other ways, Burr Robbins finally traded the show to Tom Grenier, a theatrical man of the West Side in Chicago. Grenier put it



on the road one summer and then he sold out, being divided between several of the larger shows. This was the end of the famous Burr Robbins show which made Janesville its home for so many years.

And while this may not be interesting to some of the older citizens, I thought the younger ones might be interested in knowing something about Janesville in the days when it was prominent as the home of the Burr Robbins circus and menagerie.

#### November 9, 1912

*Perhaps the average citizen fails to appreciate the fact that all big circus and amusement companies are subject to more or less imposition in the way of schemers who seek damages for alleged injuries or wrongs inflicted and that the settlement bureau of a big show is really a fine art. The average circus proprietor cannot afford to have his show held up by an attachment, perhaps miss an engagement, and consequently he often settles a claim quickly for more than the real damage inflicted, rather than have a law suit. The schemers know this fact and the unscrupulous often play upon it most successfully.*

*It takes tact and diplomacy to become a successful adjuster, and while all the big shows today carry a legal representative with them to handle these matters, in days gone by these settlements were made by some show representative on the spur of the minute. In this week's article Mr. Watt tells some of the incidents of this nature that occurred while he was with the Forepaugh show, and they prove most interesting reading.*

Thinking that the reader might possibly be interested in the different happenings along the road at different times with the "Big Show," I will tell you of a few that happened.

We were showing in Boston, Massachusetts, opening there Monday for a two weeks' engagement, and Dr. Carver, the great rifle shot, was the feature or at least was the one great feature with the show. The show always opened afternoon and evening with the doctor's act which consisted of breaking glass balls, thrown high in the air, with a rifle, riding at full speed around the

hippodrome track. After this act was over Dr. Carver would then take a shotgun and endeavor to break seven glass balls thrown high in the air before they struck the ground.

About the middle of the first week of our engagement there, one of the shots went wild and struck a man on the eye, and while it bled quite a little, it did no particular damage. But he was a sharper and spread the blood around his eye and climbed down the seats and told a few people that he had been shot in the eye and passed out of the show and went to his home.

The news soon got to Mr. Forepaugh and of course he was anxious to make a settlement. He sent one of the head men with the show to find the man and settle with him and not to return until a settlement was made, regardless of the cost. His claim agent took a carriage and set out to find the man.

After the show was all over about a dozen of us waited impatiently in the ticket wagon for the return of the claim agent and to find out how much money it cost to shoot a man's eye out in Boston. About 11 o'clock he returned and showed Mr. Forepaugh a receipt for \$450 in full of all claims and damages, and Mr. Forepaugh was one of the happiest men in all Boston that night.

He said to the balance of us around him, "That man shall surely do all that kind of work for this show as long as I own it." He was expecting that it would cost him several thousand dollars in place of a few hundred.

A couple of days later shortly after people had got into the show, an old gentleman came to the ticket wagon and asked me where he could find Mr. Forepaugh. I told him he would find him at the main entrance and in

Dr. Carver as pictured in a Forepaugh courier.



a few minutes Mr. Forepaugh was listening to his story. He said to Mr. Forepaugh, "I live next door to the man whom your agent made a settlement with a couple of days ago for shooting him in the eye." The old gentleman said, "To commence with, he has been blind in that eye for twenty years that I know of and as for the shot," he said, "that just hit him hard enough to barely draw the blood; but he made all of it he possibly could, and I understand that he held you up for \$450."

#### November 16, 1912

*In one's story travels many strange personages are met and become intimate acquaintances. David W. Watt in his years of circus life had the rare opportunity of meeting famous men and women. His fund of recollections of these events prove most interesting milestones in his life's history.*

*Today the great Joe Jefferson is but a memory to the majority of theatergoers but he was one of the great actors of the stage for half a century, and it is to be doubted if any other one man will ever take his place. Mr. Watt met him and spent many hours in company on one occasion, and the following story of this memorable meeting is told as only Mr. Watt can tell it.*

In the fall of 1885 the Forepaugh show closed the season at Norristown, Pa., which is about 20 miles west of Philadelphia on the main line of the Pennsylvania Road. The limited train in those days left Philadelphia at 10:45 P.M. and was scheduled to leave Norristown at 11:15 for the west. I was anxious to get this train for Chicago so settled up my season's work and took this train for home. There were but few dining cars in those days and the train stopped at Altoona, Pa., for breakfast at about 7:30 in the morning. The Logan House at Altoona was known to be one of the best hotels on the entire line between Philadelphia and Chicago so everybody was up and ready for breakfast.

The hotel stood about a block from the depot and when I got ready to get off the car, an old gentleman was with me. After helping him down out of the car I said to him, "Uncle, I



will go ahead and turn up a chair for you in the dining room." He thanked me and soon was sitting by my side at breakfast. After breakfast and while we were settling with the landlord I called for a cigar and the old gentleman said, "Never mind, my son, we have plenty of cigars in the car."

We returned to the sleeper together and up to this time I had no idea who my newly made friend was. He opened a valise and took out a box of fine cigars and said to me, "How far are you going?" I said, "I am going to Chicago and from there to Janesville, Wis."

The next question was, "What is your business?"

I said to him that I had been with the Forepaugh show the past season and we had closed at Norristown, Pa.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, "We should pass a pleasant day between here and Chicago for I am in the show business myself" He said, "My company opens at McVicker's Theatre in Chicago for two weeks Monday evening." Then he told me who he was and 'twas no other than the great Joe Jefferson.

He said to me, "I want you to tell me all about the circus from start to finish; how many people you carry and how large the tents are, when you usually open in the spring and all about it. When you are through I will commence at the beginning and tell you all about my early barnstorming days, as we used to call it in my business, and I think by the time we both are through we will be well on our way to Chicago."

He said, "My early experience in the business was much bitter and little sweet, and it was only after many reverses and set-backs of all kinds that it commenced to come my way later and for many years back the hardest work that I did is only a pleasure to me now."

And the day that I spent on my way from Altoona to Chicago with the great actor Joe Jefferson will always be remembered as one of the brightest of my life. At Chicago he handed me a pass for myself and wife and said he would be glad to meet us in Chicago at any time during this engagement and if we came to

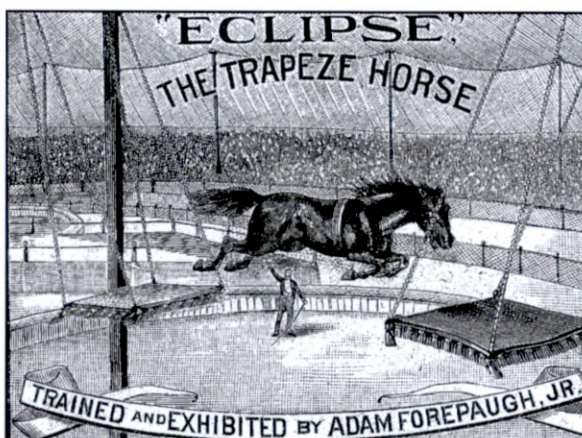


Illustration from an Adam Forepaugh Circus courier.

the show to be sure and make ourselves known. But after an absence of over seven months, Janesville and my home looked better to me than even Joe Jefferson in his great play "Rip Van Winkle."

One of the most interesting men in a way that I ever met in the business was James E. Cooper. "Jimmie" Cooper, as he was familiarly known around the show, with his partner James A. Bailey were the first and I think the only men to take a show around the world and this they did before either of them were 30 years old.

He was later for many years partner in the Barnum show, and while he was considered a hard headed, close fist business man, Jimmie's one fault or his pleasure as you might say was fast, fast horses, fine carriages and the best harnesses that money could buy. He had one of the finest private barns that I ever saw at his home in Philadelphia on Broad Street, which at that time was the speedway of Philadelphia.

Early in the eighties while the Barnum show was showing at Eau Claire, Wis., Merritt Young, who at that time was treasurer of the show, wrote a letter for Mr. Cooper to Joshua Coming, who was an owner and trainer of fast horses here in Janesville, offering him \$600 for a gray horse called Johnnie Morris. The letter was written on the Bamurn stationery with the pictures of P. T. Barnum, James A. Bailey, James E. Cooper and Jim Hutchinson as the owners and Merritt Young as ticket agent and treasurer.

Mr. Coming gave me the letter and shipped the horses as directed by Mr. Cooper to the show in Minneapolis.

Two or three years later while I was with the Forepaugh show in Philadelphia, Mr. Cooper came to the ticket wagon and said to me, "Dave, if you would like to ride after the fastest pair of trotters in Philadelphia, call around to my barn in the morning and I'll hitch up a pair for you, and one of them will be Johnnie Morris who came from your town."

I was there on time in the morning and he put the best trapping that money would buy, a Dunscombe harness and a Brewster one man wagon, and I started for the speedway and soon found out that they could step better than 30 together. The following morning he called at the hotel for me and said that he wanted to take me out and show me some of the fine buildings in Philadelphia. He drove me onto Broad Street and showed me an entire block of dwellings with brownstone fronts and every house exactly alike. He said to me, "How do you like that for a nice row of houses?" I told him they were certainly nice and he said that he had built them a few years before and there had never been one vacant since they were completed.

While he kept a stable of from 10 to 12 of the fastest trotters and pacers that money could buy, he never raced them for money, but used them on the road for his own pleasure. Everybody around the show looked alike to Jimmie Cooper and many times you would find him sitting off on the ground to one side visiting with some of the workingmen and he often told me that he had gotten many a good idea in different ways from talking with the different workingmen around the show.

Jimmie Cooper died several years ago at his home in Broad Street in Philadelphia, leaving a wife, two sons and one daughter. It is said that he left about three million in money, and this ended the career of one of the most famous men in the business and a man who was beloved by many.



# AMERICA'S SECOND LIVE RHINOCEROS

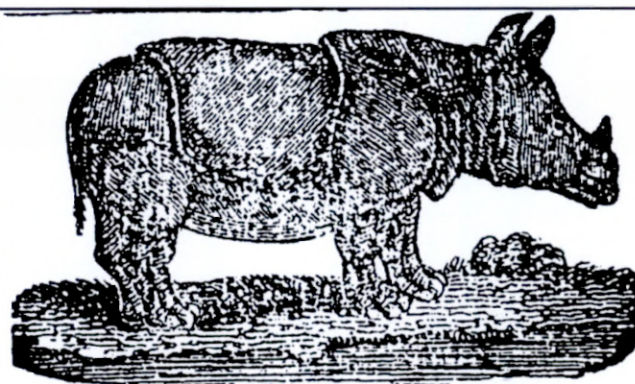
By Stuart Thayer

The William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan recently acquired some of the the papers of Marmaduke Burrough (ca. 1798-1844), a Philadelphia-trained doctor who had an interest in natural history. Burrough, as Robert Cox expressed it, "received a little slop from the bucket of diplomatic spoils," in 1828, by being appointed American Consul in Calcutta, India.

He sought to buy a rhinoceros, apparently feeling that he could profit by exhibiting one in the United States. A man named Andrew Davidson offered him two rhinos from the plains north of the Brahmaputra River. One of these was a six weeks-old male (as of 15 March 1830), five-feet, six inches long, and three-feet, six inches high. The other was an eight-foot long female, four-feet high, and three years-old. Davidson told Burroughs that there were already three rhinos in America, but that there was room enough for even more, "as I'm informed it is rather a large town." Davidson's price: 2,000 rupees for the pair.

In fact, when Davidson made this statement, there were no live rhinos in America. The first one arrived in Boston on 9 May 1830, and was put on exhibition at the Washington Gardens, Boston, on 14 May, by what was to become the firm of June, Titus and Angevine. All previous specimens--there might have been two--were stuffed. Peale's Museum in Philadelphia exhibited one in 1826 that had died en route from India to England. Tom Parkinson, *in fitt*, reported that Peale bought the skin and skeleton of another in July, 1830, but its origin has not been determined.

Davidson further offered to make a



TO BE SEEN,  
The Wonder of the Animal Creation,  
AT No. 48 SOUTH FIFTH STREET.  
A living Rhinoceros, or Unicorn, called in the native language of the East, Gondar, exhibiting at the room lately occupied by the Automaton Chess Player, a little below Walnut street, where the Ladies and Gentlemen of Philadelphia and its environs, are respectfully invited to call and see this very extraordinary animal.

This advertisement for Burrough's Rhino or Unicorn appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* in January 1831. Author's collection.

harness for the female, so that she might draw a carriage. In any event, Burrough purchased the pair, and had them shipped to Calcutta. On 7 May Davidson sent feeding instructions. He advised laying in a good supply of well-pressed doobgrass, along with pressed wheat bran. For a change of pace he suggested patting the bran into cakes and baking it. Davidson also informed Burrough that there were eight more rhinos where these came from, four of each sex.

Richard Reynolds, America's foremost authority on early captive rhinos, is of the opinion that all these animals were of the Great Indian species (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), especially since Burrough's advertisements in America showed that species. However, he points out that the now nearly extinct Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) also occurred

in the area of the Bramaputra River at the time in question.

The female of the pair died sometime before Burrough could ship them to America, there is nothing in his papers reporting this. The ship Georgian was chosen for the voyage. The bill of lading is dated 14 June 1830, and lists 500 rupees to ship a living rhinoceros and the skeleton and skin of a second one. Other gear cost 10 rupees more. A native of Bengal was taken along as the animal's keeper.

The ship landed in Philadelphia in October, 1830. The rhino was put

on exhibition at Maelzel's Hall beginning 9 December. Maelzel's Hall was a popular place for commercial exhibitions, menageries, and the like at 48 South Fifth Street. It cost Burrough \$40 a month for the rent.

Edward Freis & Co. had charge of the exhibition, and charged \$120 for wages for the two months the animal was at Maelzel's, 26 November to 26 January. This was for two attendants in the hall. Burrough paid for the advertising, \$15 for two engravings, one large one for posters, a small one for newspaper use. The initial newspaper cut was the same as the one used by June, Titus and Angevine in Boston, which raises an interesting question. Perhaps, JT&A had their cut engraved in Philadelphia.

Three newspapers were used in the advertising. The *American Sentinel* charged \$17 for an ad that ran daily from 25 December to 21 January. The *Pennsylvania Inquirer* sent a bill for \$19 for five sixteen-line ads. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* carried eighteen ads at a cost of \$19. In addition to these Burrough had 300 handbills printed



at a cost of \$6. There is no accounting for posters in the collection.

The "boy," presumably meaning the Bengalese keeper, was boarded for seven weeks and five days at a cost of \$15.75, and his laundry cost another \$2.50.

All this expense was apparently more than Burrough cared to carry, as he offered the animal for sale beginning 20 November, and paid \$5 to *Poulson's* for nineteen sale ads.

While the purchaser is unknown to us, the evidence points to James Raymond and Darious Ogden, as it was their New and Rare Collection of Living Animals that exhibited it in 1831. They spent the late summer and fall in Ohio, and then went south through Kentucky, and ended the year in Savannah, Georgia. The rhino was on exhibit with this

menagerie in 1832, 1833, and 1834. In the last two of those years the title was Raymond & Ogden's Menagerie.

With the formation of the Zoological Institute in 1835, James Raymond and Noell E. Waring folded this menagerie into that monopoly of animal caravans. It was Branch V. The rhino was still well-advertised through 1837, when all notice of it ceased. This probably dates its death. In 1840, a Raymond affiliate, J. E. M. Hobby & Co. had a stuffed rhino in its consist, which could well have been Dr. Burrough's importation.

The Calcutta phase of this report is from "The Jacksonian Unicorn," by Robert Cox, which appeared in *The Quarto*, 1:7 (April 1997). *The Quarto* is a publication of the Clements Library Associates.

### **1906 Barnum & Bailey Route Book**

### **1902 Gentry Bros. Route Book**

Both paperbound, in respectable condition.

Will trade for other other pre-1919 Barnum & Bailey or Ringling route books absent from my collection.

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# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING THE WORLD'S MOST BRILLIANT CONSTELLATION OF ARENIC STARS

VOL. V, CHAPTER 5, PART TWO

By Orin Copple King

1898

John Robinson, Greatest of All American Shows, opened the season of 1898 in Baraboo, Wisconsin, on April 27, and closed in Rogers, Arkansas, on Monday, November 7. The circus was under lease to Ringling Brothers, but Ringlings made it a well-kept secret for at no time during the Kansas tour was there a mention of the leasing arrangement and the show was presented as being under the management of the Robinson family.

The first Kansas date was May 12 at Oberlin following a short invasion of Nebraska. A five column advertisement appeared in the Oberlin *Eye* on April 28 and in the Oberlin *Herald* on the same date. The top of the ad featured cuts of the Robinsons labeled "3 Generations of Circus Kings," along with the title "The John Robinson Greatest of All American Shows."

Continuing, the ad boasted: "74 years of uninterrupted success, and now bigger, better and in every way grander than before."

"THE WORLD'S MOST BRILLIANT CONSTELLATION OF ARENIC STARS."

"First and Foremost, the Sensation of the Age, LOUIS CYR, Canada's Invincible Giant of Strength. Most Powerful Man in the World. Lifts Over 2 Tons. The Amazing Marvel of the Century. His Like Has Never Existed Since the World Began."

A cut of Cyr lifting incredible weights, including 25 men at one time. Also shown was Cyr lifting a full-size elephant.

"\$2,000 His Enormous Salary. \$25,000 Offered for His Equal."

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Orin Copple King

"More Record-Breaking Novelties Than All Other Shows Can Offer."

"All the World's Most Famous Riders—All the World's Greatest Acrobats, Aerialists and Gymnasts—All the Wide World Tributary to Its Wealth of New, Novel and Original Features."

"Most Complete Zoological Collection On This Hemisphere. Two Herds of Monster Elephants—Mammoth Hippopotamus—All Kinds of Rare Wild Beasts."

"THRILLING ROMAN HIPPODROME. 350 FINEST THOROUGHBRED HORSES. Exhibited in Startling Arenic Acts and in Exciting Trials of Speed and Endurance."

"Every Morning at 10 o'clock, Rain or Shine, the MOST RESPLENDENT FREE STREET PARADE EVER WITNESSED. Millions expended in this Dazzling Display, Gratuitously Offered to the Public."

"One 50 Cent Ticket Admits to All. Children Under 12 Years, Half Price."

John Robinson Circus lithograph featuring Louis Cyr. Library of Congress collection.

Framing the ad were two single columns of extraordinary attractions. Dominating one column was impressive claims for "Cyr, The Marvelous, Strongest Man in the World."

"His Lifting Record: 552 1/2 pounds with one finger, 987 pounds with one hand, 1,987 1/2 pounds with two hands, 3,536 pounds pig iron on shoulders, 4,300 pounds on back—*N. Y. Clipper Annual*."

"Supports 25 Men on his Shoulders, LIFTS MORE THAN ANY 5 OTHER MEN. His Measurements: Height 5 ft. 10 1/2 in. Weight 285 pounds."

"Breadth across the shoulders 27 1/2 in., Neck. 23 in. Waist 52 in. Biceps 21 1/2 in., Forearm 10 in., Thigh 29 1/4 in."

The single column on the other side of the ad listed: "FAMOUS HARVEY FAMILY, The Absolute Perfection of High Class Acrobatics. England's Greatest Arenic Sensation. BROTHERS LA ROLE Greatest of All Aerial Vaulters, in Marvelous Mid-Air Feats."

"THE GREAT BURT, Peerless Master of the Independent Ladder. A Wonder among Equilibrists. 8—MILLER FAMILY—8. Amazing Evolutions in High Class Bicycling. An Absolute Novelty in Fancy Wheeling."

"JULIA LOWANDE, NELLIE DUTTON, EDWARD SHIPP, WM. DUTTON. And a Dozen other World Famous Lady and Gentleman Riders. TRIPLE RINGS, Elevated Stages, Vast Aerial Spaces Covered Promenade. 10,000 SEATS."

The Oberlin *Eye* ran the following handout on April 28: "The announce-





ment that the John Robinson Greatest of All American Shows is to exhibit in Oberlin on May 12 will be gratifying news to thousands to whom the fame of this famous exhibition is familiar. No show has been so long identified with all that is best in the amusement world and none has so impressed its individuality upon the public. The John Robinson show dates back to 1824, and during the three-quarters of a century that it has been in successful existence it has remained in the same family of great showmen. It has descended from sire to son for three generations, and today, under the management of the latest representative of the name it still holds its place as America's leading circus, menagerie and hippodrome. The policy of the John Robinson show has always been a liberal one. No trouble has ever been too great and no expense too vast, when the end to be attained was the pleasure and entertainment of the patrons. The result of this policy is apparent in the immense popularity of this show and the success which characterizes its exhibitions in all parts of the United States. The plans for the present season are more comprehensive than ever. There are more high-class performers, more circus acts, more horses, and a bigger and better menagerie, and those who witness the performances to be given in this city cannot fail to be impressed by the grand scope of the show as well as be delighted by the brilliancy of the exhibition. The most famous acrobats, the world's leading lady and gentlemen riders, the most startling aerial performers, and the most unique acts in every department have been secured for the show. Prominent among the special features is Louis Cyr, the Canadian giant of strength, who is not only the strongest man on the globe today, but he discounts any athlete of which any record has ever been made in the history of the world. His feats of lifting are almost beyond belief, and no preliminary announcement can give any adequate idea of his marvelous performance. Mr. Cyr is assisted by Horace Barre, the French Samson, who is also a record-breaker. The performance of the John Robinson

**THE JOHN ROBINSON GREATEST OF ALL AMERICAN SHOWS**  
 74 YEARS OF UNINTERRUPTED SUCCESS, AND NOW BIGGER, BETTER AND IN EVERY WAY GREATER THAN EVER.  
 The World's Most Brilliant Constellation of Arenic Stars  
 FIRST AND FOREMOST, THE SENSATION OF THE AGE.  
**LOUIS CYR** CANADA'S INVINCIBLE GIANT OF STRENGTH.  
 Most Powerful Man in the World. Lifts Over 8 Tons. The Amazing Marvel of the Century. His Like Has Never Existed Since the World Began.



**\$2000 HIS ENORMOUS WEEKLY SALARY** **\$25,000 OFFERED FOR HIS EQUAL**

**More Record-Breaking Novelties Than All Other Shows Can Offer.**  
 All the World's Most Famous Riders—All the World's Greatest Acrobats, Aerialists and Gymnasts.  
 All the World's Most Extraordinary to the World of Show, Novel and Original Performers.  
**MOST COMPLETE ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTION ON THIS HEMISPHERE.**  
 Two Herds of Monster Elephants—Mammoth Hippopotamuses—All kinds of Rare Wild Beasts.  
**THRILLING ROMAN HIPPODROME.** AND FIRST THOROUGHBRED HORSES. Exhibited in thrilling races and in the famous trials of speed and endurance.  
 EVERY MORNING AT 10 O'CLOCK, RAIN OR SHINE, THE  
**Most Resplendent Free Street Parade Ever Witnessed.**  
 Banners Regarded in this dazzling display, gratuitously offered to the public.  
 TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY, AFTERNOON AT 2 O'CLOCK AND NIGHT AT 8 O'CLOCK. DOORS OPEN ONE HOUR EARLIER.  
 ONE 50 CENT TICKET ADMITS TO ALL. CHILDREN, UNDER 12 YEARS, HALF PRICE.  
 WILL POSITIVELY EXHIBIT AT—  
**Horton, Monday, October 3, 1898.**

This Robinson newspaper ad appeared in the *Horton Commercial* on September 22, 1898. Kansas State Historical Society.

show are given in three rings, on two stages and upon a racing track, under an immense pavilion. The hippodrome races are thrilling and realistic. The menagerie is the most complete zoological display in the United States, and from beginning to end the show is one of novelty, uniqueness and magnitude."

Press agents should be admired for their ability to write so much and say so little.

After the exhibitions the *Herald* reported that, "Last Thursday The John Robinson Great Show was in town. It had been extensively billed and everybody came and brought their wife and children. It was the biggest crowd ever seen in Oberlin. The crowd was estimated from five to seven thousand. The receipts were said to be \$3,500. The entertainment was first class, the animals numerous and we heard very little complaint from any one, all seeming to feel that they got their moneys worth. Every thing was in a systematic order; all bills were promptly paid and the managers were gentlemen that it is a pleasure to do business with. The Robinson Show is certainly all right."

The *Eye* estimated the matinee audience at "More than four thousand people."

Friday the 13th was a lucky day for Norton as recounted by the *Norton Courier* following the exhibitions.

"The John Robinson circus and animal show which entertained an immense crowd in Norton, on Friday last was an entire success in every respect. Every actor was an artist in his or her line. Every performance was excellent from the clowns to the expert wheelers the Miller family, and the strong men performed some great feats of lifting. There were no plug uglies with this show, and it was remarked by many 'how quiet every thing goes on.' It was a gentlemanly crowd from the manager to and including the best looking and most genial press agent, F. B. Wilson, that ever traveled with a show."

The *Norton Liberator* agreed with the *Courier*, but added praise for the Robinson detectives.

"Its police system was also all that could be desired and as a consequence there was an absence of skin games, or anything which could give trouble to our city officers. In this respect, Norton has been favored for several of the last years; which shows that show business is getting onto higher grounds."

Also noted by the *Liberator*, "Mr A. Miller of Hill City visited friends and took in the big show here last Friday."

And, "Miss Olive Martin and Carl Brown of Long Island attended the great show here last Friday."

And, "the ladies of the Norton Presbyterian church served dinner and supper at the Lane building." The *Liberator* failed to report the success of the venture.

On May 14, The John Robinson Greatest of American Shows played Arapaho, Nebraska, followed by 18 other Nebraska dates. South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Missouri all saw the show before it returned to Kansas for performances at Troy on October 1.

The ad used at Oberlin was used in the *Troy Times* and in all subsequent Kansas towns.



"The show last Saturday," according to the *Times*, "brought large crowds to town, in fact the largest that has been in Troy for several years. The circus was a very good one."

The *Times* also noted that, "One of the performers in John Robinson's show had his leg broken while doing the tumbling last Saturday night. He was taken to St. Joseph [Missouri] to the hospital the next day."

The Horton *Commercial* reporting the events of circus day, Monday, October 3, related that "On account of the circus, the school children of Horton enjoyed a half-holiday Monday afternoon. The half-holiday was not announced until the faithful had begun their afternoon work. 'Hurrah for Dyche' shouted the school boys as they set out by the shortest route for John Robinson's big tents."

Scattered about the news columns of the *Commercial* after the show had gone were, "The absence of street fakers and skin games was particularly noticeable at the Robinson show."

"The show was well patronized by people of neighboring towns Monday. Everest, Muscotah, Whiting, Powhattan, Baker and Willis were particularly well represented."

"W. W. Murray was up from Straight Creek Monday to see the show and buy some white-faced cattle."

"Dr. Calnan and Editor Calnan, with their wives, accompanied the crowd from Powhattan to Horton Monday."

"The school board met Monday night, but there was no quorum, and adjournment was taken till Saturday night. Too much circus Monday night. The members of the board all had to take their children."

"The John Robinson circus showed in Horton Monday to a good crowd. There would have been a larger attendance had not rain threatened in the morning. The show has some excellent features. The efforts of the management to keep away fakirs and pickpockets, is especially commendable."

The Horton *Headlight* also had praise for the Robinson show and pointed to another benefit provided

by the circus.

"There is scarcely a business man in Horton who will declare that a crowd doesn't pay. People like to be entertained and hundreds of people were in town Monday to see the circus. They spent lots of money with the show people, but likewise they spent a great deal with the merchants. We know of three firms which together sold over \$1,000 worth of goods and got the cash for them. Besides this they had a large credit trade."

Ahead of circus day in Wamego, on October 8, advance agents Dick Hunt and W. H. Horton visited the town. The Wamego *Kansas Agriculturist* described them as "the kind of gentlemen business men like to meet. They know when they are being fairly treated and it would take a dandy to 'do' them."

"The thousands of people who came to Wamego last Saturday to see Robinson's circus were agreeably disappointed," according to the *Agriculturist*. "It was much larger than they expected. The street parade was excellent and the afternoon and evening performances gave universal satisfaction."

"The best feature of the Robinson show is the absence of all kinds of fakes. There was not one of those smooth tongued gents with the show."

"Any time the Robinson circus visits Wamego it will be assured of a large crowd."

The *Agriculturist* also noticed that, "Wamego merchants, especially those

carrying dry goods, had a big day Saturday. All the extra clerks that could be secured were engaged and yet there were more customers than could be waited upon."

"Those having special sales for Saturday were delighted with the number of sales and each of the four large dry goods stores report excellent trade. The grocery stores and restaurants also reaped a harvest. People had come for miles to see the show and there were few who did not leave a few dollars with some of the business men."

"A circus may take money out of the county, but they were very good trade winners, especially when they come as late as the one of Saturday."

"More people visited the show here than at any place it had been for three weeks," the *Agriculturist* reported. "This statement was made by one of the managers."

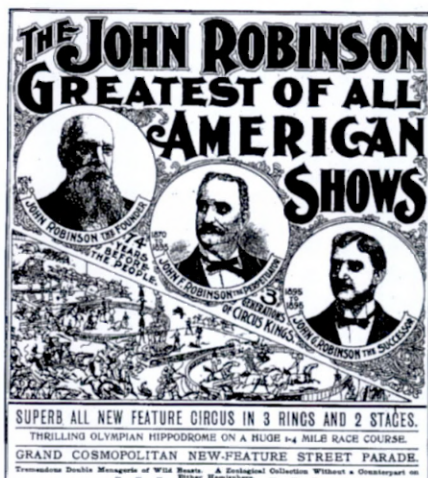
Press agent Frank Stible on show day was a visitor at the office of Wamego's other newspaper, the *Times*.

"Mr. Stible says the management is very particular about 'camp followers,' 'grafters'—men who conduct 'skin games'—and that they even have to prosecute such men themselves to convince people that they have no connection with the show. This is certainly creditable, and, we might add, very unusual."

The *Free Press*, Hays, concerning the exhibitions there on Monday, October 10, gave the Robinson show a good report. "The circus arrived Sunday noon and an immense crowd watched them unload. Everything was done systematic, smooth and not an oath was heard. Neither was there on the ground, altho' it was raining and everything sticky. It is entirely prohibited."

"Circus day was a beautiful one and the largest crowd ever seen in town was here to enjoy it; the Ellis-Wakeeney train was jammed full, and wagons came from every direction, and they were well paid for coming. The morning procession was the finest ever shown here, 3 bands, a steam calliope, beautiful chariots and animal cages, open so the animals could be seen, 6 large elephants and a herd of camels. All a beautiful sight."

Pictorial from an 1898 Robinson herald. Circus World Museum collection.





"At the afternoon performance over 3500 sat there and enjoyed it; the fat man [Cyr] did all promised in the bill and the bicycle family did theirs; two rings and a stage always going, the trapeze, tight rope and everything good and interesting. By all odds the largest and best show ever here, worth the admission."

In conclusion the *Free Press* voiced the only complaint reported in Kansas.

"But the management want to call down the reserve seat sellers at entrance to big tent. These men, from the first, told people they could get no seats, would have to stand, unless they bought reserved seats, which was a deliberate lie, disgusted many patrons, some leaving the show not being willing to be gouged. It was the only drawback in their show and should be corrected."

Circus day in Russell on October 11, was highly successful for the Hotel Faulkner which began feeding the hungry at 11 a. m., and continued until 12:30 p. m., when supplies ran out and they were obliged to turn away a large number.

The above paragraph and the following report are from the *Russell Record*, October 15.

"John Robinson's circus was a drawing card. It drew the largest crowd seen in Russell in many a day. The weather in the morning was very fine and at 8 o'clock teams could be seen approaching from every direction. The livery stables were filled in short order and citizens who had stable room had a chance to accommodate their country cousins. By 10 o'clock Main Street resembled a bee hive.

"The show itself arrived on time and created some racket switching and unloading cars. By sunrise a village of tents had been raised and the preparations were proceeding with the regularity of perfect organization. Hundreds of people assembled at the grounds to see the formation of the procession and see it start. It was the largest and finest procession ever seen in Russell.

"The number in the tent at the afternoon performance was over 5,000. The performance was good but there was really

too much of it. It would require three pairs of good eyes to see it all, as there were so many things in motion at the same time. The most interesting novelties were the bicycling and the feats of Mr. Cyr the strong man. The feats performed on the bicycles were astonishing. A person could not believe it possible without 'the sure avouch of his own eyes.' A number of pretty stout men were invited to examine the weights used by the strong man. They were pretty solid chunks of iron. There was no snide about this performance, and the same is true of all the rest.

"The music was good, not barring the clown band, which was good of its kind. Mr. R. C. Harner, the piccolo artist, is a printer from Taylorville, Ill., a first-class gentleman and a good musician.

"Mr. Robinson himself is a very pleasant gentleman, and will have no men in his employ who do not conduct themselves properly. The circus has a reputation to sustain. Every person who attends John Robinson's circus feels that he has not been swindled, but has received the worth of his money."

The Robinson show was well received at Lincoln, Kansas, on October 12. The next day the *Re-*

This Robinson newspaper ad appeared in the September 30, 1898 *Wamego Times*. Kansas State Historical Society.

*publican* had some interesting comments.

"The schools in town and most of those through out the county, so far as we could learn, took a holiday yesterday on account of the show. Teachers and pupils alike were in to see the elephant,"

"D. E. Rafferty was among the Sylvanites attending the show yesterday. He said that the agent at Sylvan sold 85 tickets yesterday morning to say nothing about the children sandwiched in."

"The *Sentinel* came out a day early this week so the office force could go to the circus with a clear conscience."

Incredibly, the small town of Lincoln had three newspapers. They all carried the same advertisements and handouts, but after show day the *Sentinel* and the *Banner* had nothing to say. "The billing car for the John Robinson circus," according to the *Current Remarks*, one of Lyndon's three newspapers," was here last Friday. The business of billing is carried on in a very business like way and with the aid of men and teams engaged here the country was thoroughly covered with their paper."

The *Lyndon Journal* commenting on show day, on October 14, reported that, "The John Robinson Show that exhibited in our city last Friday was equal to the largest shows that travel; but, while some shows have three rings and the Robinson Brothers only

two, a three ring show is a worry to the people who go there as there is always something occurring in the third ring you do not see.

"The list of animals in the menagerie was full and included the finest specimens.

"Their acrobats were of the highest order, and their wire walkers and contortionists cannot be excelled.

"Their strong men are all they advertise and their clowns are up-to-date.

"The show is different from most other shows—they have exactly what they advertise on the billboard.

"The one great feature of this aggregation is the fact that there



is not a confidence man, a fakir or a swindler allowed about the show.

"The side shows are true to their ads and are deserving of patronage.

"Should these people come to Lyndon again they can count on an additional thousand to the 3,000 people who witnessed the show here October 14."

The ladies of the Christian church served dinner and supper in the old Exchange Bank building.

The Sunday school show was praised by *Current Remarks*. "The John Robinson circus which showed here last Friday is a new thing in the circus line. It is the only one of the kind we know of, and we like it. In the first place, it is a first-class show, both circus and menagerie, and showed practically all it billed. But the greatest feature was the perfect order of things. From their arrival to the time of their departure we did not hear a harsh word nor a word of profanity from anyone connected with the show. A friend tells us that while loading at night one of the horses made some trouble and the driver swore mildly, whereupon the foreman tapped him on the shoulder and warned him against a repetition of the offense. We met a good many of the men, bosses, performers, band men and employes, and everyone appeared to be a gentleman, and we have not yet ceased to wonder at the innovation. They enjoyed a fine day and an immense crowd here. It was no small day for Lyndon."

The show had a difficult day, on October 15, at Florence. The *Bulletin* reported that, "The John Robinson circus exhibited here last Saturday under many disadvantages. There was such a high wind that they were unable to put up their main tent. They put the animal tent up early in the morning, and used it for their show tent, and left the menagerie outside. The side show was brought up town and put in the Horner building. The show was the best that has visited Florence for many years and was witnessed by a big crowd."

"Cold weather caught the Robinson show at Larned on October 18, according to a pair of items in the *Tiller and Toiler*.

"A sudden drop in the thermometer last Sunday kept the temperature

down to the freezing point here several days the first of the week. Such another severe change at this season is not recorded in the memory of even the oldest inhabitant.

"A large crowd attended the Robinson circus Tuesday in spite of the cold weather. The show was up to the average, and was conspicuous for the absence of the usual bunco games and gambling devices attendant upon most tent shows."

A side effect of the cold weather was that it "made the merry-go-round people pack up their horses and their murder-inspiring 'tune' and depart for warmer climes."

The school children of Stafford, according to the *County Republican*, were given a holiday to see the Robinson show on October 19, but unlike children in other towns the Stafford children were required to attend school on Saturday to make up the lost time.

On October 15 the *Newton Daily Republican* stated that, "Robinson's train consists of twenty-two cars."

The *Evening Kansan*, Newton, disposed of the Robinson circus in a few disjointed paragraphs following the exhibitions there on October 26.

"The stores have been crowded today and business was very good.

"The Hotel Newton was full last night. The Clark also reports a good business.

"The circus band played two standard overtures before the regular performance.

"The sun has tried hard all day to struggle out and lower the thermometer a little, but failed in every attempt.

"Two of the head men in the circus are French-Canadians, who were raised with Joe Gravel. They held a reunion this morning.

"Just why people will drive fractious horses by a circus parade has never yet been satisfactorily explained, but they do it every year.

"Sheriff Means kept a close watch on the show grounds this afternoon and no skin games were worked.

"Frank Stible, the press agent of the Robinson shows, is an old newspaper man and political worker. He was in charge of one of the bureaus of the republican national committee, in 1896. He is an old soldier and was

a member of the president's body-guard during the inauguration ceremonies."

John Robinsons Greatest of All American Shows played to good houses all through its Kansas tour. The show was praised in every town, and the only disparaging remark was in the *Hays Free Press*, concerning the lies of the reserved seat ticket sellers.

It was truly a Ringling show.

In 1898 John Robinson exhibited in these Kansas towns: May 12, Oberlin; October 13, Minneapolis; May 13, Norton; October 14, Lyndon; October 1, Troy; October 15, Florence; October 3, Horton; October 17, Dodge City; October 6, Belleville; Oct 18, Larned; October 7, Junction City; October 19, Stafford; October 8, Wamego; October 20, Newton; October 10, Hays; October 21, Medicine Lodge; October 11, Russell; October 27, Fredonia; October 12, Lincoln; October 28, Galena.

\*\*\*\*\*

Professor Gentry announced the coming of his show to Topeka for exhibitions on May 6 and 7, 1898, with a one-column ad in the *Topeka State Journal* on May 5: "PROF. GENTRY. The foremost animal trainer of the world, and his TALENTED ANIMALS in a brand new performance. BETTER. Than ever this season and in his 12th YEAR [Cut of liberty ponies] Under canvas at 13th and Harrison Sts., May 6 and 7, at 2:30 and 8 p. m. [Cut of dogs pulling a wagon of monkeys]

"PROF. GENTRY'S SHOW Always has been and will continue to be the foremost trained animal exhibition in the world, and this season finds it positively better than ever before. An entire train load of handsome ponies, intelligent dogs and comical monkeys, presenting the best show of the kind on earth. Admission 25c Children. 15c."

Also on May 5 the *Journal* ran the following handout: "Prof. Gentry's school of performing dogs and ponies, which are to exhibit under a tent in this city, on the corner of Thirteenth and Harrison streets, Friday and Saturday, May 6 and 7, at 2:30 in the afternoon and 8 o'clock in the evening, will be a great treat for



the little folks. The exhibition, while it is especially attractive to the children, is equally enjoyable by the older people, and the many additions which have been made to the show this year, make it more attractive than ever. There is a big troop of monkey actors this season in addition to the dogs and ponies, all of which have some new act to present."

After the two-day stand the *Journal* had nothing to say, but the *Topeka Daily Capital* reported that, "Professor Gentry's dog show drew large crowds Friday and Saturday. It was a good show."

Gentry played Hutchinson on May 14. Ahead of show day the *Clipper* carried a handout concerning the educational possibilities of animals.

"The educational possibilities of the brute creation have probably been reached by Prof. Gentry, who is known all over the land as a wonderful trainer of dogs and ponies. His latest effort, however, is said to be decidedly his best and many new acts are added to his already excellent show this year, such as the Gentry fire department, all the members of which are dogs, ponies and monkeys. They rescue helpless animals from the building, operate the apparatus and in fact do everything that a human company could. The chief of the brigade is a large monkey and issues the orders and directs the work with the precision of a veteran fire fighter. There are many other novel and interesting acts which will be seen this year for the first time. The exhibition will exhibit under canvas in rear of Santa Fe hotel on May 14, at 2 a. m. (sic) and at 8 p. m. The prices of admission are children 15 cts., and adults 25 cts."

An unusually attractive ad appeared in the *Clipper* on May 11, featuring a cut of dogs dressed as humans and one pushing a baby buggy containing a puppy.

The *Clipper* was well known for its reportage of entertainments.

"Prof. Gentry's dog and pony show drew an immense crowd on the street Saturday to witness the parade which was one of the grandest of its kind ever given in Hutchinson. An afternoon and evening performance was given in the large tent back of the Santa Fe hotel and was largely

**THE FAMOUS ORIGINAL**  
**PROF. GENTRY'S SHOW.**  
**UNDER CANVAS**  
Rear of Santa Fe Hotel,  
**Saturday, May 14th.**  
Afternoon at 2, Night at 8 P. M.  
EXACTLY TWICE ITS FORMER SIZE THIS SEASON.  
Everything new. Not an old act retained, but an entire new  
program brimming over with original entertaining and novel  
acts of all descriptions.



**SUPERB STREET PARADE**

The Hutchinson *Clipper* published this Gentry ad on May 11, 1898. Kansas State Historical Society.

attended by the young and old. Since Mr. Gentry's last appearance in our city he has added many improvements, such as a miniature fire department, police patrol, etc. The dogs and pionies (sic) are well trained and all together an excellent performance was given and all felt well repaid for having gone.

"The Gentry Dog and Pony Show was here on [October 10] and did a fairly good business," according to the *Pittsburg Kansan*. "The tents were erected on the vacant lots opposite the Stillwell Hotel. Their show was a good one and their parade a novelty."

Farther down the column the *Kansan* reported an unfortunate happening. "On Monday Supt. Russ of the city schools dismissed the pupils of the public schools half an hour before noon in order that the youngsters might enjoy the parade but through a misunderstanding the parade was all over with before the children got down town."

\*\*\*\*\*

A two column advertisement for Hawkins & Green's Dog and Pony

Show appeared in the *Neodesha Evening Register* on June 3 with additional insertions of June 4 and 5.

The ad announced the coming of the show on June 7, describing it as "An entertaining, Moral and Instructive Exhibition of Well Trained Animals. A Delight for the Children. A Splendid Silver Cornet Band will entertain the lovers of music. Watch for the big Parade at Noon. Tent at Corner of Main and Ninth St. Admission 15c and 25c. Two Performances Daily. Afternoon at 2 o'clock. Evening 8 O'clock."

The *Register* reported that, "Mr. M. E. Green, representing Hawkins & Green's Dog & Pony Show, was in the city today [June 3] and made arrangements for an exhibition here next Tuesday. This is represented as being a show of a very high character, consisting entirely of the tricks and antics of trained dogs and ponies in which the animals exhibit a degree of intelligence far greater than they are supposed to possess."

In an adjoining column the public was instructed to "Take the children to see the Dog and Pony Show Tuesday," and, "See the big parade led by a band of trained musicians, with the finest silver instruments, and consisting of trained dogs and ponies and their trainers, next Tuesday, Hawkins & Green's Dog & Pony Show."

On show day the *Register* repeated the two-column ad with a new heading, "We Are Here!"

"The Hawkins and Greens' Dog and Pony show," the *Register* reported, "came in from Yates Center this morning on the Mo. Pacific. They put up their big tent at the corner of Main and Ninth streets, and though delayed and hampered by the rain, they made a very fine street parade, and both children and old folks were out in force to the afternoon performance."

The final words on the show were published June 8. "The animals showed a high degree of training and were well appreciated by the fair sized audience which attended their performances. It was devoid of the usual rowdyism that frequently attend such institutions and deserves well of the public."

An advertisement in the *Humboldt Herald* touting the exhibitions of June 1, proclaimed in big print, "COM-



## Coming! Coming!

### Hawkins & Greens' DOG AND PONY SHOW

With their big tent full of  
trained Dogs and ponies.....

### Grand Street Parade

at noon, led by  
Prof. Keifer's Silver Cornet Band

A free ride for the children at the  
Afternoon Performance.

AFTERNOON AT 2. EVENING AT 8

Admission, 15c and 25c.

ADDITIONAL LOCAL.

Fire and Cyclone Police at J. H.  
Arnold's Agency.

The Herald

This Hawkins & Green newspaper  
ad appeared in the Humbolt *Herald* on  
June 10, 1898. Kansas State Historical  
Society.

ING! COMING!

"Hawkins & Greens' DOG AND  
PONY SHOW With their big tent full  
of trained Dogs and ponies.

"GRAND STREET PARADE at  
noon, led by Prof. Keifer's Silver  
Cornet Band. A free ride for the chil-

dren at the Afternoon Performance.  
AFTERNOON AT 2 EVENING AT  
8. Admission, 15c and 25c."

A story in the *Herald* explained  
the interest in Prof. Keifer and his  
band.

"The dog and pony which is to be  
here tomorrow is one of the best  
attractions of the kind on the road.  
Their band leader is Mr. Will Keifer,  
an old Humboldt boy, well known to  
all the people of this city. This fact  
adds interest to the coming of the  
show, as Mr. Keifer's identification  
with it is a strong recommendation  
in its favor. There will be two per-  
formances, in the afternoon at 2 and  
in the evening at 8, thus giving  
everybody an opportunity of attend-  
ing."

No mention of the show was made  
after the exhibitions.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bonheur Brothers created small  
excitement and was generally  
ignored by the Kansas press.

On June 21 and 22, the show per-  
formed at Hays. The *Hays Free  
Press*, on June 18, carried a short  
paragraph concerning the show.  
"Don't miss the free outside perform-  
ance just before opening of the

## CIRCUS COMING. BONHEUR BROS. CIRCUS.

Comedy & Minstrel Show,  
in Hays Tuesday & Wednesday  
next, June 21st & 22nd.

Acrobats, Contortionists, funny  
French clowns. Great troupe  
trained billy goats that do all I  
talk. The best troupe of educated  
Dogs that ever trouped under a  
white tent. And many more feati  
that is sure to please you. Admiss  
is low. Only 25cts. Children 15 cts

With its name misspelled, this  
Bonheur Bros. newspaper ad ap-  
peared in the *Hays Free Press* on June  
18, 1898. Kansas State Historical  
Society.

Bonheur Show Tuesday and Wednes-  
day nights. It costs you nothing.  
Free as the air you breath."

Bonheur Brothers played Oberlin,  
Kansas, on July 27 without causing  
any comment in the press.

Research funded in part by grants  
from Wolfe's Camera & Video Inc.  
Topeka, Kansas.

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Handmade of Ceramic Bisque -  
He is 22" long. And dressed in the  
style of a "classic white-face", in  
white cotton w/ red satin trim.

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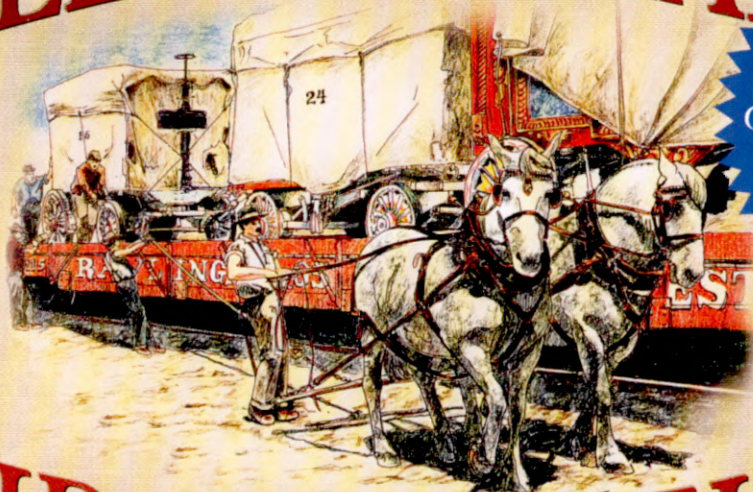
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"Your descriptive powers are excellent. In case after case the scene is set in an evocative manner with a minimum of words."  
*Fred D. Pfening, III, Managing Editor of Bandwagon, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc.*

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